



HAPPY TEARS

A Family Idyll

by

“Norman Grace”

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

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ILLUSTRATED BY

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WILDFIRE

A Wildfire Club Edition

Introduction © MCMXCV Miss Regina Snow

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INTRODUCTION

IT WOULD be pleasant to announce that *Happy Tears* is the first of a series of reprints of classic disciplinary literature to be issued by the Wildfire Club. Unfortunately, it is not. Very possibly it is the only one we shall ever do.

There are a number of reasons for this. Very little of the literature of discipline deals with our special subject of feminine discipline. Being written chiefly by men and for men it tends to accord a central position to men, whether as givers or receivers of chastisement.

To this fact must be added the fact that the vast majority of literature in this field is deplorably bad: both bad as literature and morally bad. The discipline described is either harsh and cruel or lascivious and indecent—frequently both. The prose is often very bad not simply in ways which would annoy a schoolmistress (a failing which may be dismissed by modern minds, but not by ours), but in that it fails of its object. Where it intends to invoke the living reality of punishment it merely regales us with stereotyped descriptions, inadequate visions, physical impossibilities and (in the worst cases) endlessly repeated 'sound effects' such as WHAAK! and AARGH! (capital letters and all) which, while they may be highly amusing to third-formers when encountered on the pages of *The Beano*, fall, in the context of 'adult' literature, rather short of the erotic potency of a seaside postcard.

So, when we have put aside that 'classic disciplinary literature' which is male-dominated (and few things are more male-dominated than male 'submission'), that which is cruel or obscene and that which is just awful, what is left?

We do not claim to be experts, but so far what we find left is *Happy Tears*. There may be other undiscovered gems awaiting us—we sincerely hope there are—but at the moment, *Happy Tears* will have to do.

Happy Tears is by no means a great work of undiscovered literature. The prose is not highly polished, the style is often a little *gauche*. What it is is an honest, warm-hearted book that deals with the subject of discipline in a manner that is refreshingly decent and morally sound. The delicate understanding of *nuances* of feminine discipline and the feminine perspective have led to conjectures that 'Norman Grace' was actually a woman, perhaps named Grace Norman. The author, it is clear, *believes* in discipline. It is not, for her, simply an indulgence. It is not an outrage to be perpetrated on the unwilling for one's own gratification, neither is it a clandestine act to be shared by the willing for purposes of illicit pleasure. It is not a thing to be concealed in dark corners and sniggered about. It is simply and unequivocally a good thing; a redeeming and ennobling thing; a thing to be shared with those who stand in need of it for the benefits it can bring them.

There is certainly a sensual element to the discipline depicted in *Happy Tears*, but that is always secondary, and seems to belong more to the reader than to the participants (unsurprisingly, since they are mostly blood relations). That there is a positive emotional power in discipline that is by no means solely erotic comes across very clearly in these pages. That the undressings described in the book are directed at the libido of the reader is undeniable: but to read them with too much of the jaded cynicism of the late 20th century would be to denature them entirely. We must understand that whatever they mean to us (and the present writer would prefer them to have been left out), they certainly do *not* mean that to the mother and daughter concerned; and much of the subtlety and depth of the *frisson* should derive from the fact that they do not.

Again, we may question the propriety of describing the *déshabillement* of a nubile adolescent girl to a prospective stepfather who has only recently met her. In real life such a thing would be foolish if it was not mischievous. In the context of the story, the stepfather quite obviously regards the matter in a purely parental light and we should be wilfully misreading the book if we suggested otherwise.

The world of *Happy Tears* is, in many respects, an ideal world. It is a world in which discipline operates to the benefit of all concerned. We see the maid in the Gilmore household is treated with what appears to be harshness combined with coldness, but she clearly adores her mistress *because*, not in spite, of her treatment. She is terrified of the thought of losing her job not because she fears unemployment, but because she is afraid of losing a mistress and a situation so essentially congenial to her.

To some readers this may appear strange, but the Aristasian experience of voluntary bonded maidservants has shown that such things are very much a part of real-life feminine nature. The present writer knows several maids who live full-time with strict mistresses, who adore them and who would be horrified at the thought of being removed to a home where they were never again to be whipped.

The late-20th-century mind will immediately assume that erotic gratification is the sole motivation for such girls, and the late-20th-century mind, as usual, will be wrong. The subtle complex of motivations is different in each individual case. We should venture to say that in no case is the sensual motivation entirely absent, in very few is it heavily predominant and in none is it the sole motivation. On its own, it simply could not be sufficient to direct an entire way of life. Genuine devotion, the need for security, the desire to create and participate in a true home, the ancient vocation of service and a longing for submission that is spiritual in origin and may be spiritualised in practice are among those motivations which lie deeper and last longer than mere surface eroticism, although the latter may be healthily bound up in all of them.

Happy Tears does not attempt to analyse such complexities of motivation. It is not a book of that sort. Nonetheless, the author is, on some level, aware of them, and when we say that the sensuality of the book exists more for the reader than for the fictional participants, that is not because the book's outlook is either dishonest or naïve, but because it is true to life. For an outsider looking in upon the closed world of a disciplinary household, its sensual aspects will be the most immediately obvious and appealing. For one actually living in that world they will have become greatly sublimated, and deeper considerations, which can hardly be expected to affect the reader will be an integral part of her consciousness, woven into the fabric of her daily life. *Happy Tears*, while it is content on one level to pose as mere erotica, remains constantly true to this deeper reality.

The nature and benefits of discipline are discussed frequently in the book, and here the writer shows a very firm and responsible grasp of the real issues that is far removed from the banal and purposeless self indulgence of pornographic flagellationism. The problem of acquainting Mr. Lacy's daughter Hester with the disciplinary régime under which her prospective stepsister and friends live is described as being that of "how to break the sad news to Hester that all these girls acknowledged a higher authority than their own moods or impulses. . .". Nothing could express more concisely the fundamental nature of real discipline. Hamlet says: "Give me the man who is not passion's slave", and in that single, striking line sums up one of the cardinal points of the philosophy that has guided human civilisation from time immemorial—whether we are speaking of civilisation in India, China, Arabia or Europe. To follow one's passions is not freedom, it is slavery. The passions—"moods or impulses"—are blind, unreasoning promptings by which only the inferior maiden will allow herself to be governed. Furthermore, these passions are easily manipulated by less impulsive persons—so the maid who is "passion's slave" may soon find herself the unwitting slave of those who are, in this respect if no other, superior to herself. This is Othello's tragedy.

With the darkening of traditional wisdom in the modern West, blind obedience to the passions—"doing what we want when we want"—has become more and more conceived as freedom rather than its opposite. It is still understood in some degree that our will and our passions may not be the same thing. If we will to stay slender, for example, but our passions direct us to eat cream cakes, we may understand that there is a conflict in which we may exercise our *will*, that is our freedom to do what we have chosen, over our passing desires and impulses. This, however, is a very watered-down remnant of the traditional ideal. We are really only pitting a longer-term desire against a short-term one.

Although those who diet—often to excess—feel a vestigial sense of 'virtue' in doing so, as if they had been following a Higher Law rather than

their own longer-term desires; they really recognise no higher reality. We may well say that such disciplines as dieting are a *substitute* for higher and more transcendent aims in a world which has stripped itself down to the basest material level. The puritanical, nature of food-faddism, anti-smoking campaigns and so forth—often strangely impassioned out of all proportion to their mundane and trivial nature—express the repressed desire for transcendent purpose and the discipline of an authentic civilisation in a world that has lost all connexion with higher reality. Modern sociologists speak of everything that smacks of thrift, providence or the responsible behaviour of respectable family life, as ‘deferred gratification’ as if the only possible alternative to immediate self-gratification—to being passion’s slave—were the same thing at one remove. And for the impoverished culture of the late 20th century, that is the bleak truth.

What, then, does the author of *Happy Tears* mean in speaking of “a higher authority than their own moods or impulses”? Does she mean merely that the personal wills of the girls’ mothers are imposed over their own? No, she certainly means something more than that. Until very recently it was realised implicitly that civilisation carried a higher value in itself—that in conforming to the æsthetic and cultural norms and aspirations of civilisation one could elevate and purify oneself. This notion, however attenuated it may have become in later times, is essentially much wiser and profounder than it may appear. What is being conformed to is what C.S. Lewis, in *The Abolition of Man*, refers to as the *Tao*, taking that Chinese term as a general designation for what Shakespeare calls Degree, the Hindoos call *dharma*, the Buddhists the Middle Way and we Aristasians the Golden Order (*chrysosthemis*).

It has long been the fashion to call the Norm or *Tao* into question on the essentially unphilosophical ground that civilisation has been far from perfect in practice and has manifested many faults and evils. Such an objection is as absurd as to reply to the statement that a motor car is a device for driving from one place to another by saying that it is not so, because this particular car has broken down and that one has run out of petrol. We live in a fallen world, as all traditions agree. Few earthly things live up to their ideals. The answer is not to discard the ideal, but to do *our* best to live up to *our* part of it.

By the time *Happy Tears* was written, the attack on the *Tao* was well under way. The doctrine that to obey the passions was freedom was being promulgated vigorously among the young by the Iagos of the moneyed interest and its mass-media. Hester is a typical product of this process. Nevertheless, there is a huge difference—we will suggest an *absolute* difference—between that time and the later 20th century after the cultural Eclipse of the 1960s. In *Happy Tears*, the characters are living in a world, whatever may have been its faults, in which the fundamental values are

sound. A girl can grow up straight and true and lovely without cutting herself off completely from surroundings too corrupt to sustain civilised life. Provided she is careful about whom she associates with, provided she is well disciplined and kept clear of the chaotic forces emerging on various sides, she can live and grow and blossom into a beautiful, uncorrupt, feminine creature and live a civilised and attractive life. So can her daughters. Her granddaughters, however, will be born into a very different sort of world; but that is another story.

In *Happy Tears*, those who adhere to traditional discipline know one another and intermingle. The families are closely connected, not by blood, but by conviction, affinity and the deep friendship that grows therefrom. In this respect there is a certain similarity with the Aristasian colonies after the Eclipse, when it is necessary for civilised people to band together and cut themselves off from the surrounding 'culture' in order to continue to live a civilised life. There is a hint of hostility in the world beyond. Mr. Lacy at one point even considers the (remote) possibility that his daughter might report the disciplinarians to 'the authorities' Nevertheless, the families attend contemporary cinema showings (as no civilised person can do in the decades following the Eclipse) and their children mix with other children from families outside the Circle—carefully selected for their decency and respectability, of course, but nevertheless, such things are still possible.

The aim of discipline is to bring out the highest and the best in the girls. As Mrs. MacAllister says to Hester:

"I want to see your complexion fresh and clear, and your character big and noble, like Betty's; and to have you admired just as she is. Do you know why her character is even more beautiful than her face?" No answer. "You don't answer, but you really know why. It's because I've been whipping Betty several times a week since she was eight years old. You see what I've made of her, and what Aunt Louise accomplished with Janet, and Aunt Caroline with Alice and Josephine. There's still enough time to make a beautiful girl of you also and I intend to try very hard."

Her father says, in reply to her appeal against the discipline:

"Don't appeal to me, my child. I've been expecting, almost praying for this, and now I am happy that it has come. My wish is that my dear wife—your mother—should have absolute authority over you. I gave it to her some time ago with my full blessing. I shall not interfere in whatever she does with you. Be courageous, obedient, and proud of such a mother as Betty has. Let's hope the time speedily comes when we have two wonderful Bettys in our happy home."

"Our happy home" is a significant phrase. *Happy Tears* is subtitled *A Family Idyll*. The idealism of the book is centred not on the masculine domain of the Great World (the *Agora*), but on the feminine domain of the Home (the *Hestia*). The reform of a darkening world is not its aim, but

rather a salvation based upon the fundamental building-block of civilisation—the home. Again there is a parallel between the world of *Happy Tears* and the home-based secession of Aristasia. It is too easy, in a world dominated by masculine values, to be led into the erroneous assumption that the Agora is the only world that matters. The Hestia, after all, is where we live. Let that be corrupted and everything is lost. Let that be preserved in harmony and happiness and the rest need not matter very much. Certainly not in times when no genuine reform is possible and things are only likely to slide from bad to worse for the foreseeable future.

The *positive* function of discipline is fully recognised in the book. Hester at one point likens a whipping to a bath. It is something that cleanses and tones the system. It is after this very whipping that Hester sees her come downstairs:

When Hester saw Betty come in to the dining-room she was breathless with amazement. This wasn't the same girl she left in bed! This one had just stepped from a bandbox. She looked the perfect product of a personal maid's attention—bathed, powdered, massaged, manicured, dressed! True enough, she had seen Betty look fresh and beautiful before, when she came down from her bed of pain (now that she knew what happened upstairs each time), but she never looked as resplendent as this. Positively,—but that was absurd!—she seemed to look better after a whipping than at any other time.

This last statement may seem, to many who have not experienced discipline, the most outrageous in the book. One might accept that discipline performs a necessary function. One might accept that it has (although hardly between mother and daughter) an element of sensual excitement. But that it can produce this radiant glow, can freshen, stimulate and purify—and all this when there is no sensual element involved—this surely is pure fable; wishful thinking; the baseless fancy of an author too much obsessed with the subject for discretion or common sense.

And yet I can vouch for the fact that it is perfectly true, and know several others who can do likewise. Corporal punishment is a remarkable thing, especially when practised between females. Its power to leave one feeling cleansed and purified is extraordinary. It can also impart a delightful feeling of pure submission which takes the form of a gentleness and a trembling delicacy, which, for many women who have lived all or most of their lives after the Eclipse, may be the first experience in their lives of total femininity. Outwardly the effect is to make them more beautiful and feminine in appearance, and more than that, to impart a special, æthereal quality of feminine *daintiness* (note how that once-popular word has all but disappeared from the post-Eclipse vocabulary) which simply does not exist in the post-Eclipse world. In other words, it can help us to recapture a grace and a beauty which has been part of the human experience throughout the whole of our history and has been destroyed only recently by the

heavy hand of crass ideology. The effect upon a pre-Eclipse girl would no doubt have been rather less striking, but I can well believe that the charming transformation described above was well within the powers of correctly and lovingly administered corporal punishment in any era.

I do not say that corporal punishment necessarily has this effect on all occasions. To begin with it must be sensitive, and must be given with love; and then the precise effects are always somewhat unpredictable. Those who use corporal punishment either as an instrument of oppression or as a crude tool for sexual arousal cannot have any notion of the feelings described here. I would suggest that there is a certain current of sensuality in all female discipline—by which I do not mean *sexuality* as the vulgar reductionism of the paperback-Freudian imagination would have it, but a sensuality which, like that of a mother suckling her child, is by no means wrong or inappropriate between blood relations. However a too overt sensuality would certainly hamper the cleansing and *feminising* effect of discipline which we are discussing here. I have myself experienced it especially on occasions when I had no desire on any level for punishment; when it was merely a workaday matter of being chastised for some fault, perhaps by a mistress in an Aristasian schoolroom for whom I had no very strong feelings. Indeed it is the sensation of *submitting* one's will, of accepting what one does not want—not what one only half does not want—that often helps to produce the effect.

What is it, then, to which one submits? In some degree it may be the will of an individual, but beyond, and *through*, that it is the Golden Order, the entire enchanted world of feminine discipline. If I may make so bold as to quote myself, it is the sensation I have described in *The Feminine Régime*:

“They [the feminine authorities of Aristasia] were *real* authority. They were what authority ought to be. One could put oneself in their hands. If one had done wrong, one could confess to them and trust them to punish one and set one on the right path, like a kind, strict aunt rather than a faceless machine or a confused collection of individuals. One felt an almost voluptuous sense of submission in being a subject of the Empire—the sweet, curious voluptuousness of normal life. . . . Most Imperials were obedient and took a magical, impersonal-sensual pleasure in their obedience; a thing unknown outside a feminine matriarchal order.”

The Feminine Régime may be a fictional book, but this is not fiction. This is the truth as I have known and lived it and as I continue to do and shall, *Dea volente*, until I die. I do not know, for I have no experience, whether this can really work between mother and daughter, but I do know that what is described in *Happy Tears* can work within a willed and voluntary feminine order such as Aristasia, and that what the author describes of the experience is surprisingly accurate; whether from pure imaginative affinity or from knowledge either at first or at second hand, I cannot say.

For myself—though this is but a personal taste—the introduction of the male of the species into the disciplinary process, whether as giver or receiver, is an infelicity, though it is done tastefully enough within the limits of the book, and was perhaps, in a certain sense, necessary. It would have been possible, of course, to construct in the 1930s a fantasy world in which only women and girls were present, but it is of the essence of it that *Happy Tears* is not set in a fantasy world. It is a family idyll and its purpose—or at any rate its effect—is to show how life *could* be lived, not in a fantastical setting, nor in one artificially contrived by the participants to their own special tastes, but in the world as it still existed—flawed and threatened, perhaps, but still essentially whole.

After the Eclipse, the very portrayal of a half-decent world would in itself be a fantasy. The portrayal of a self-created, all-female world has become the least fantastical of all options open to the writer of such a work. That world, after all, actually exists, while a normal, civilised 'world at large' is as thoroughly dead as Byzantium or Periclean Athens. There is no longer a 'world outside', but only a lunatic void, and we are children of the Void, compelled to create a world anew and enabled to create it in any way we choose. It is no longer incumbent upon us to be 'responsible', either in literature or in life, by taking into account the realities of 'the world as it is'—for the civilised world no longer is—and the only responsible action we can take, either in literature or in life, is to secede utterly from a world gone mad and to build models of a real world that the future may draw upon. That some of these models should be fantastical does not seem to me a fault. We can have no idea what—if anything—will come after the Void. We do know that there are avenues of human sensibility that history has so far left unexplored—breathtaking vistas and intimate delights. We, who have been robbed of the birthright of a world to live in, are entitled to build our own world as we choose. We owe nothing to the present, though we perhaps owe something to the past and to the future. In building that which has never been, though with infinite respect (a respect entirely absent from the Promethean inanity of the post-Eclipse world), we may well be paying both debts—the second more richly than we know.

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Women wishing to visit or to become a part of Aristasia, the feminine disciplinary world referred to by Miss Snow, are invited to write in the first instance to: The Imperial Ambassador, C/O The Wildfire Club, B.M. Elegance, London W.C.1. (full address).



IT WAS a swift courtship. From the first meeting on the white-hot sands in front of the boardwalk hotel, where Arthur Lacy met the young woman who was his promise of a new and wondrous life, to the signing of the marriage register at the City Hall, only a brief five weeks elapsed. This lucky accident came late enough, for he was swiftly approaching the half-way mark to his fiftieth birthday. Although a handsome individual of classic mien and cultivated manner, he was never in robust health, being between ten and fifteen pounds under-weight for his five feet seven inches. But at any rate, he was matching the second quarter of a century of living with a second marital experience. The comely young woman who was giving up the cumbrous name of MacAllister for the easy two-syllable Lacy was also having her second adventure in marriage. That was by no means the only coincidence, for both of them were parents of single offspring, and in each case a daughter. Here the similarities cease. Mr. Lacy's daughter was almost eighteen, Mrs. MacAllister's a mere fifteen. And the two girls bore no more resemblance to each other than Indian and Negro.

Hester Lacy was gawky for her age, four inches over five feet and tipping the scale around the 105-mark*. Her regular features, well-shaped head and rich golden brown hair should have made her attractive, but she had an uneven tone in her skin, lacklustre eyes, wayward pimples that returned again and again no sooner were they chased away, and an undeniably angular appearance. The last effect was enhanced by thin calves and ankles with the wrists rather bony. She ate irregularly and sparingly, and being a victim of occasional headaches had a tendency to get irritated over trivial things.

A different type entirely was young Elizabeth MacAllister. Here on the beach in a snug-fitting Lastex bathing suit, playing ball with her mother, one could observe a wholesome-looking youngster whose lithe body and symmetrical curves showed to highest advantage whether in repose or at play. Vivacious eyes, fair hair, pink skin, two hard little breasts protruding against her pale green bathing suit, the round and firm hips of a grown young woman, with well-turned legs and ankles—these were the tokens of a future popularity that would spell social success even if they couldn't ensure happiness in all pursuits.

It may be seriously doubted that Arthur Lacy would have admitted, even to himself, the real reason for his swift decision and swift courtship.

* 105 lbs—i.e. 7 stone 7 lbs.

But the credit for his new-found happiness lay in the fortuitous circumstance that had made his right cheek the sudden target for a fast ball Eleanor MacAllister thought she was throwing to her daughter on the beach. Mr. Lacy was not even in the path of their ball-playing, being clearly the victim of a wild pitch. It stung good and hard and he could not resist rubbing his cheek, up to the moment when Mrs. MacAllister was upon him, when he gallantly desisted and smiled. It was a curious augury of their future, but little did they know it at the time. With the young mother blushing furiously and offering earnest apologies, and Mr. Lacy gaily pooh-poohing the incident they found themselves in animated conversation, the victim presently enquiring if he might participate in their game. After introductions Mrs. MacAllister readily assented, and for the next ten minutes she and Elizabeth, her daughter, and Mr. Lacy shot the ball around between them.

At every momentary interval he tried to take in the figure and personality of the girl's mother, with each glimpse bringing additional support to his first favourable impression. For Eleanor MacAllister was a true product of Scotland, firmly set up, broad shoulders and wide hips, solid breasts, straight back, broad nose and thin, high forehead, brown hair of silky texture, clear skin, lively brown eyes. Were it not for his estimate of the daughter's age as fifteen or sixteen, he would have guessed the mother's years as not more than thirty-one or thirty-two, but that was absurd, of course. Her modern tight-fitting one-piece bathing suit meant that her figure could be studied in every detail, giving the impression of that age. It was a figure many a girl of twenty-one would envy, though some might hesitate over the pronounced slope and amplitude of the bottom swinging broadly out from a rather narrow waistline. Indeed, her young daughter's seat showed the same tendency. But whatever doubt he may have had about her age he was sure of one thing: what she lacked in pitching experience she made up in strength, because every time he caught her throw his palms stung, even though it was only a rubber ball they were tossing around.

Presently Mrs. MacAllister gave sign of wishing to terminate their play. Mr. Lacy quickly perceived it. They shook hands all around, Elizabeth remarking with a twinkle in her eye, "I do hope Mother didn't hit you harder than you are willing to admit, Mr. Lacy." They all laughed, and while Elizabeth stooped to gather up the beach things, Mr. Lacy expressed the hope that they might have more ball practice tomorrow. He bowed himself away, satisfied that he was being tactful in not pressing his advantage upon the charming couple. This decision he made with more or less cheerfulness, for he was a very lonely man.



HE DIDN'T see them any more that day or evening. He strolled on the boardwalk for a while after dinner, but a mist coming up made the walking not too pleasant, and he reluctantly went in to the first moving picture theatre he reached. In the morning, when he entered the dining-room for breakfast, he espied Mrs. MacAllister and her daughter, both in fetching morning attire, at a wall table, but his eyes also took in at once the fact that they were finishing breakfast. Accordingly, he was careful to take a chair at another table, turning however to greet them before sitting down.

They acknowledged his "good morning" with a friendly response, Mrs. MacAllister even calling over cheerfully:

"No bandages. I am glad to see."

"No, and no lawsuit, you'll be glad to hear," he returned, while they all burst into laughter.

They waved again to him in a few minutes as they left the dining-room.

It was a capricious sun that morning and the beach was quite empty, even though at this point of the boardwalk it would never be very full. Neither was the verandah being patronised, and only a few men and women were ambling or sitting around in the main lobby.

At the noon hour, however, the sun came out in full vigour, chasing the last flicker of cloud away. While for breakfast, guests were permitted to sit anywhere in the dining-room, for dinner and supper they were expected to take the same places originally assigned to them. Mr. Lacy saw his erstwhile playfellows at the far wall, but had no favourable chance, being a diffident man, to speak with them. At any rate, he decided later to get into his bathing suit and look around for the couple on the beach; there being really nothing else he could do.

In a remote section, some five hundred feet south of the hotel, was a piece of beach generally unfrequented. It adjoined a breakwater pile, was more pebbly than sandy, and was reputed to have a strong undertow. Rarely were more than ten or twelve bathers to be found lying around on an area equivalent to at least two city blocks. Lacy, walking in that direction, discerned at last his two acquaintances from the hotel. Mrs. MacAllister and her daughter were both reading books, the former comfortably seated in a beach chair, the girl stretched at full length on her stomach, the book she was reading propped against two pillows. Around them lay their towels, slippers, some rubber balls and two ten-

nis racquets. Elizabeth's body from her waist down to her calves was covered with a shantung beachrobe. They looked up as the man approached and greeted him courteously. An uncomfortable feeling came over him as he realised that he was doubtless intruding. He said to himself that, as they came that far away from the hotel, and as they were both reading, it was more than likely he was not very welcome.

"Won't you sit with us?" asked Mrs. MacAllister, taking him by surprise.

"Thank you very much, you are very kind. I should be most happy to sit with you, but please assure me you won't interfere with your reading on my account."

"No, you won't interfere. I am tired of reading anyway. Let's talk a while."

Lacy's eyes beamed with pleasure. "But that will be disturbing to your daughter," he demurred gently.

"That can easily be arranged. Do you want to push off somewhere by yourself, Betty dear, or would you prefer to come with us?"

"Well, mother, I am in the midst of a very interesting chapter. I'd like to finish it, if you don't mind, and then I'll quit too. After all, I've been reading for over an hour."

"All right, darling, you are excused."

Elizabeth picked herself up, gathering the beachrobe round her waist, took her book and pillows, smiled at Mr. Lacy, and walked off to a distance of about fifty feet.

"You must be proud of your daughter, Mrs. MacAllister," he began, "she's a lovely child, the picture of good health and attractiveness." He sighed. "I wish I could say that about my daughter"

Mrs. MacAllister looked pleased. "Oh, you have a daughter too?"

"Yes, only mine is older. She will be eighteen soon."

"Is that so? But is there anything the matter with her, Mr. Lacy? You seemed sad, or if you'll forgive me, a little envious."

"You caught that, didn't you, Mrs. MacAllister? I guess I couldn't conceal my envy. Perhaps it isn't her fault, poor child, but my daughter hasn't had the advantages of a mother's interest since she was eight years old. You see Mrs. MacAllister, I am a widower."

"Really, Mr. Lacy. I am sorry. And I am a widow, so there's a coincidence. What does that make us?" She laughed somewhat nervously.

"Oh, eh, nothing, I guess. Nothing yet, I mean . . . Oh that's not what I mean at all. Please forgive me, you must think I am outrageously forward. I really wasn't trying to suggest anything, Mrs. MacAllister."

"Your explanation makes it only worse and more complicated." She

reached over and touched his hand. "But don't worry, I forgive you, and maybe you ought to forgive me too. We seem to be getting ourselves badly involved. Shall we change the subject?" Her eyes were bright with laughter.

"Please do. Let's. Would you like to play some ball? When your daughter rejoins us, I mean. I promise not to stop the shots any more with my face."

"Your gallantry, Mr. Lacy, is not only admired but appreciated. I have a feeling you're not going to publish abroad my awkwardness as a baseball pitcher." She leaned over to the right, cupped her hand around her mouth and called:

"Hey, Betty sweetheart, I am sorry to disturb your reading. Would you like to throw a ball around for a few minutes?"

"All right," she called back. "Let's go." She stood up where she was but didn't come forward, instead, she closed her book, put her beachrobe over it, and began doing some stretching exercises while her mother and Mr. Lacy made themselves ready and all took places to form a triangle. They threw the ball back and forth briskly for some minutes. Several times in running for the dropped ball Mr. Lacy came close to Elizabeth, and to his great surprise he noticed a number of unmistakable welts, as well as scattered black and blue marks, on the girl's bare thighs. They were so active in their playing that it didn't seem the time to pause and ask her how she got those marks; they certainly weren't there yesterday when they played on the beach.

All during the rest of the ball-playing Mr. Lacy kept thinking of those welts. What could have made them? Bruises of course, black and blue marks, could happen in a thousand ways. But welts! Try as he would he couldn't explain them. At any rate, he resolved not to ask Betty or appear to notice them—a stranger must mind his own business, he said to himself.

After a few minutes the girl came running forward, holding the ball in her hand. Her mother and Mr. Lacy joined her, the latter trying hard not to look at the welts.

"Mother dear, it's almost three o'clock. May I go in now and get dressed? I don't want to keep that girl waiting."

"I didn't realise it was that late. Yes, darling, go ahead. Hand me my purse and I'll give you a dollar. The scarf was 79 cents, didn't you say?"

"Yes, mother."

"See that you pick a longer one now, not like you did last year. And you won't stay away later than five-thirty. What did you say that girl's name was?"

"Estelle Merryman."

"I am sorry I didn't speak to her this morning when I had the chance, but then her parents seemed nice. You must tell me what the girl is like when you return, and remember five-thirty."

"Yes, mother," she said, kissing her on the cheek, "and goodbye Mr. Lacy." She ran off at great speed toward the hotel

"I think you have a wonderful daughter, Mrs. MacAllister," burst out Mr. Lacy, "perfectly lovely to look at, so well mannered, I think she's a little peach!"

"Thank you very much, Mr. Lacy, it's nice of you to say that, but ... but don't you think I deserve a little credit too?"

"Oh, indeed you do! Yes, yes, a thousand times! How did you accomplish it? What is your secret?"

"I don't know how to answer that to a stranger. I would say firmness and constant but not too obtrusive watchfulness were some of the policies."

"That's just exactly what my daughter never got, Mrs. MacAllister, unfortunately. I have been shamefully neglectful of her since her mother died, depending on houseworkers and housekeepers who came and went, leaving behind them nothing but confusion and irritation. The child was difficult, the women were incompetent, and I was absorbed in the promotion or liquidation of business enterprises, generally with less rather than more success."

"That's a pity. I guess Betty and I were more fortunate. Her father provided us with a modest income, and adding that to a small independent one of my own, we have managed tolerably well, permitting me to give full attention to my daughter's upbringing. These are the trying years of girls, as you know, and a steady hand is their greatest need, and that's what Betty has had from me all her young life—a firm and steady hand. Nor have I ever allowed sentiment to soften it. The results, I know, speak for themselves." She looked into his face with an air that attempted to be stern but could not conceal her light-heartedness.

He caught only the predominant tone of cheerfulness.

"Then if you'll forgive a feeble joke, will you please explain what happened to that firm and steady hand these last twenty-four hours?"

"What do you refer to, sir?" she said, trying to frown through her laughing face.

"I refer to the bruises or welts on your daughter's thighs. I was sorry to see them. Did she have an accident?"

"Oh, those? No, she didn't have an accident. They only bear out what I've been trying to say."

"I am afraid you are burdened with a dull-witted person who must seek a clearer explanation. Forgive and be patient."

"All right. You asked for it and you can have it. Betty has been brought up on a generous diet of milk, good food, fresh air and plenty of whippings! Don't get startled! What you see on her thighs is the result of a punishment she received last night, that's all."

Lacy was speechless. He opened his mouth several times but nothing came out. The comely young woman who shocked him into his present bewildered state regarded him with curious amusement. Finally, he said:

"You mean to say . . . last night? . . . What could she have done that warranted anything like that? . . . And why was she so cheerful, and playful, and . . . and affectionate this morning? . . . I am afraid I don't understand anything?" He grinned and then blushed for grinning.

"My dear friend, to answer all your questions would take a day and a half. At any rate, don't be so shocked. Believe it or not, I am merely carrying on an ancient and honourable tradition. I whip Betty, my mother whipped me, her mother whipped her and so on back and back. Here we are. Look us over. What do you think?"

"I think you are both too wonderful for words. As a matter of fact, I can't say now for the life of me which excites my admiration more—mother or daughter."

"Well, I hope, Mr. Lacy, for propriety's sake, you will make the decent choice."

They both laughed uproariously. What an uncommon woman she was! He felt deeply grateful for the lucky accident that had placed him where he was. At that moment he wouldn't have changed places with the King of Siam!

"Then won't you tell me more about this . . . this extraordinary discipline, shall we say, your child, your family, has been subjected to, and why and when and what for?"

"Would you mind if I did it with the aid of a cup of tea? I am tired sitting in this chair, I would prefer to go in and dress for dinner. Wouldn't you like to do the same, and then we could meet in the coffee shop?"

"Agreed. Excellent idea. Let's go!"

THEY selected a corner around which ran a buff-coloured leather bench attached to the wall. They sat alongside each other, both facing the door through which Mrs. MacAllister expected to see Betty on her return. Arthur Lacy more than ever admired his companion, for in her dark-flowered silk dinner dress she looked very fetching. The picture of good health with her erect posture and full but 'disciplined' figure, she was at her age a magnificent prize for a mature man who has a proper appreciation of the sensual values women in their thirties can possess.

"Now please begin at the beginning. Why should a sweet girl like Betty require to be whipped, of all things; tell me that first."

"So, Mr. Innocent, that she may leave the impression wherever she goes of being a fine, sweet girl. You won't be offended if I observe that even you got that impression."

"Ah, you are treating me too kindly. I deserve more than that rejoinder. But coming from such a charming and competent mother, how could the child ever require such physically painful and, I am sure, humiliating punishment?"

"The compliment hasn't eluded me. Thank you. But my actions, like yours, are governed by my convictions. I was never the one to wait on remonstrances with children, empty threats or puerile punishments, hoping to accomplish in a year what my own experience tells me a thin little leather strap can produce in a short ten minutes. That pretty much states the story. For seven years now I've settled my differences, big and little, with my daughter by putting her across my lap face down and whipping her healthy bare little bottom with a strap. In this manner I whipped out many disagreeable traits. Some of them were deep-seated and required heroic treatment, others were merely incipient, but out they all must go I said, and by this time they are nearly all on the run. Before she's old enough to marry I hope they'll be nothing but memories."

"It's still so confusing and startling that I don't know what questions to ask first. To be sure I am not hearing for the first time that some children get spanked or whipped but that a girl as large as Betty . . . that I should be seeing her with my own eyes and talking to her . . . I . . . just don't get it! Won't you tell me please to begin with why she doesn't resent it and why she isn't ashamed of being punished in such a manner?"

"Well you've seen her around me for two days. How would you define her attitude? It seems to me that should be convincing enough. For the fact of the matter is that not only does she not resent it but she loves me dearly as I love her dearly. Perhaps I'd better explain why that is so. If you knew more about these matters you would understand that such a successful result is a mother's greatest triumph. I am not afraid of anyone charging me with conceit when I assert that only the most competent mother can hope for such results. The first thing I went after in Betty was the tendency to sulk after punishment; that I attacked virtually without pity for I knew I must fail if I didn't destroy that habit. A dozen times I began and carried out a new whipping right on top of the one just finished because I found her sulking. I paid not the slightest attention to her cries or her pain, but kept warning her that this would continue indefinitely until she stopped it. While I remained harsh and inflexible on this issue, I realised, however, what my task was between times. I realised that I must pile proof on proof of my devotion to her highest interests.

"This attitude, and this sense of obligation, hasn't altered to this day even though we understand each other thoroughly now. I had to work hard to win her confidence, and it isn't to her discredit that it took her a while to see it. If I wasn't mending her clothes I was knitting sweaters for her, or preparing a favourite dish of hers, or helping her in the friendliest manner with her lessons or defending her if she was in trouble or nursing her attentively if she was indisposed. I proved conclusively by word and deed that I was her best friend and whipping her all along as she grew up was my manner of proving it. I kept reminding her that I was bringing her up no more strictly than I was brought up, and I urged her to keep asking herself the reasons why she respected and loved me, and to supply her own answers. I never ceased reminding her that while she was being trained to endure physical pain she was also arming herself at the same time against the vicissitudes of a treacherous world. At this stage, I am happy to say most of the energetic spade work is past; now I have the joy of watching how beautifully the plant grows."

"Then why does she still offend after all those whippings? Seems to me by this time she should have been letter perfect as to what she must do and what she must not do?"

"Because she is human, because she is still a child—my child, because she is a natural not an artificial person, because she is whipped where other girls are scolded. By this time it's as ordinary, as frequent, almost as uneventful a procedure as giving a child a bath or washing

her hair. The punishment is incurred, the whipping is administered, there's a little crying, then the work or play which is interrupted by it is quickly resumed and there you are. No fuss, no great excitement, no recrimination from either side; we love and trust each other as always."

"This is the most extraordinary and I must admit the most compellingly interesting thing I've ever listened to in my life. I am positively overcome with admiration for you both. But what about her friends, her closer companions, do they know or suspect about this . . . er, discipline? Doesn't she try to conceal it from them?"

"We have tried to be sensible about this as in all other respects. Betty has two friends about her own age with whom she has been growing up and both of these girls get whipped. Their mothers and I are old friends, and though we frequently argue about details of discipline, these arguments are always good-tempered. Betty has other girl friends and acquaintances who know nothing about her whippings, and for a very good reason. I insist on knowing every girl she associates with, and I have invariably agreed with her that it would be futile to make confidantes of them. They serve their purposes as acquaintances without the necessity of discussing matters with them neither they nor their parents would understand. When any of them are with Betty and I am there, I always carefully respect her feelings; she can remain perfectly at ease knowing that no remark or gesture of mine will embarrass her."

"My respect for you, I can feel, mounts higher and higher. But those two girl friends you spoke of first, are they as unemotional about whippings as Betty appears to be?"

"Now, now, Mr. Lacy, I hope I didn't give you the impression that she is unemotional about it. You don't think she's made of stone, do you? What I've been trying to point out is that I've trained her to control her emotions, but that doesn't by any means say she hasn't got them. I assure you my Betty is flesh and bone, blood and nerves, like any other normal person; and when she's being whipped she suffers as much pain as though it was the first time. That goes in equal measure, I might say, for the other girls."

It was evident to Lacy that she was taking pride in her own accomplishments as much as in her daughter's superb development. Moreover, she was relishing the opportunity to display them before this man whom her judgement told her she could trust. In any event she had nothing to fear, her instinct being her safest sentinel against the subtlest indecent suggestion. And it was true. Her companion, rapt in the images his mind was conjuring up, was now on the very edge of the wall bench, his eyes and ears straining to take in her every word, ges-

ture and mannerism. He was agitated by the fear that he might forget to ask all the many questions that were crowding against the roof of his mouth. Running around in his excited mind was a group of other questions: suppose he married her, but would she marry him, and what about Hester, what would she say, and how would they get along, and how would he explain it, and what ought his attitude to be, and could Mrs. MacAllister make Hester into as charming a young lady as Elizabeth was a child, and wouldn't Hester with her bad temper run away or do something desperate like denouncing him to the authorities, and what else and what else? But he jerked himself back to keep up with the lovely Eleanor's explanations.

"May I ask why you whipped Betty last night? When I saw her last yesterday, and even today, she looked as though she wouldn't offend a fly."

"Oh, she did something in the bathroom I didn't like. She was very untidy."

"You must have whipped her very hard for that, judging by the welts she is carrying."

"Not at all. Oh! There she is! Will you run and get her, Mr. Lacy, please, so she won't have to look for us."

He wasn't half way to the door when Betty perceived him and her mother. She rushed in, dodging between chairs and tables.

"Gosh! I am all out of breath; I was running. It isn't 5:30 yet, is it, mother? Hello, Mr. Lacy. We stopped to look at a young woman who was drunk and making a big scene right on the boardwalk in front of a movie. It isn't 5:30 yet, is it mother? I asked you that before."

"It's very close to it. Let me see the scarf you bought."

"Oh, I nearly forgot. Here it is. Don't you think it's nice?"

"Lovely! Pull it around more to the centre. Very becoming indeed. I am glad you picked that one. For once you showed nice taste."

"Oh mother, you're joking! You liked the sandals I bought, and you liked the green hat I selected in the city. She's just teasing, Mr. Lacy."

"I am sure she is," he managed to say between gulps of breath.

"You are both right. I was only fooling. What sort of an impression did that girl make on you, dear?"

"Nothing much, mother. She's not exceptionally bright. Had to promise I would ring her when we get back to the city. Maybe I'll give her another try, if you don't object. Gee, mother, I'm awfully hungry. When do we eat?"

"Well, if you are hungry, dear, then we will eat early. Come, we'll go upstairs and you can wash and change your dress."

She put her arm around Betty's shoulders and pulled her close. Mr. Lacy motioned to the waitress for the check. They all rose.

"Thank you very much for the tea, Mr. Lacy. Perhaps we'll see you after dinner. Will you excuse us? Come, dear."

Mother and daughter walked toward the elevator. Mrs MacAllister still had her arm around Betty's shoulder, and with her free hand she was holding the girl's parcel.



FTER dinner Lacy took up a position in the lobby where he felt he couldn't miss the MacAllisters no matter what they planned to do. He was half-right and half-wrong. He didn't miss them and was greeted very pleasantly, but Mrs. MacAllister said she had accepted an invitation from Mrs. Merryman, the mother of the girl Betty had gone shopping with in the afternoon. Estelle and Betty, and Mrs. Merryman and herself were going to the concert on the pier; she hoped they would see him again tomorrow.

A sinking feeling of emptiness came over him the like of which he thought he hadn't experienced in the ten years since his wife's death. Prodded by his loneliness, now made suddenly so acute, he perceived a battle gathering where his better judgement would have to fight off a powerful temptation to possess Eleanor MacAllister's heart. He knew it must be a rash attempt, bound to cause profound embarrassment to both, for in the light of what he had just been told such an alliance would be much too complicated. Besides, what else did he know about her, and what did she know about him? Even less about him! And yet the temptation to try monopolising her time during the rest of her stay was almost ungovernable—mother and daughter both fascinated and charmed him beyond expression.

Suddenly, the most brilliant idea that ever came into his head burst upon him. He would phone or wire Hester to join him here at once! Let Mrs. MacAllister see her. Let her meet Betty. Then he could talk, concretely, specifically to Eleanor. But weighing the outcome of such a meeting his spirits fell. Some one was sure not to like some one else. Besides, how could Eleanor with the best will in the world, and all her competence and experience, reconcile the radically different natures and upbringing of these two girls. How could Eleanor, above all else, solve the problem of Hester were she to consent to take the name of Mrs. Lacy. Although the girl was really spoiled and headstrong, moody

and restless, still, she was almost eighteen and that fact presented a serious problem.

Nevertheless, as hopeless as it looked, it was his greatest opportunity to solve the two most vexing difficulties of his life by one master stroke. It was worth the most gigantic effort. He sat in the lobby until half past eleven weighing plan against plan. Then he ran off to his bedroom to continue his thinking, not wanting to be seen sitting around alone in the lobby at this hour by the MacAllisters who might be along any minute.

It was past two when he put the light out, but by that time he had made his decision. He would phone Hester very early in the morning and, fabricating a story, tell her he had run across just the fur coat she was looking for at one of the boardwalk auction salons, that it was going on sale at 2:30 this afternoon, for her to hurry down on the first train and be prepared to spend the rest of the week with him. After she arrived he would tell her that he had called the management and that they told him they were obliged to withdraw the coat from the sale at the order of the executor of the estate. Having produced Hester he would now endeavour to engage Eleanor in a series of heart to heart talks, and throwing his daughter into her daughter's company they would all be able to judge presently what the reactions were all around. It was a brilliant plan. The only thing absent was the assurance of Mrs. MacAllister's favourable disposition towards him and his daughter. That was all, yet it was more than enough. And knowing Hester as well as he did he felt that his own chances with Betty's mother might not have been altogether hopeless, but with her in the picture it looked pretty grey. But he would do his very best, and try to keep his chin up if he lost.

The ruse succeeded. Hester said she would leave at once, and asked her father to meet her at the station. This he did, and braving her annoyance, he broke the sad news to her at once about the coat, but suggested to her that they would follow the sales the rest of the week and might pick up as good or even a better-looking coat. He was not without a sense of annoyance himself because up until train time almost he sought in vain for the MacAllisters. This was the first slip in his plan, for he had meant to apprise them of the sudden coming of his daughter so that the explanation could precede the introduction by several hours. Now he would have to do it all at once, all because they had the habit of disappearing on him all the time; he was annoyed and worried.

Meanwhile he turned his efforts to telling Hester about Mrs.

MacAllister and her daughter. While Elizabeth—her mother called her Betty—was only fifteen, nevertheless she was a very charming and pretty girl, very sensible, well-mannered and with a natural talent for making friends. He sincerely hoped they would like each other, and he urged Hester to put herself out in friendliness this time because he had become quite fond of the MacAllisters. Hester wasn't indifferent to his plea, for she knew no one at the shore and although Betty MacAllister was too young for her, she would have to do under the circumstances and she would do her best to be nice to her.

Luck finally broke for him at the hotel. While Hester had gone to her room to wash and change clothes, he bumped into Eleanor MacAllister and her daughter. He not only had a full chance to tell his story but he made bold to invite them to sit at his table for dinner and was overjoyed when they accepted. He ran off to see the headwaiter, ordered a bottle of wine, special dishes and flowers. The dinner was a big success. Mrs. MacAllister beamed with pleasure and surprise at the attractive table. Mr. Lacy was gratified to see that Hester looked better than she generally did. The dress she wore, the colours she had selected, the manner in which she fixed her hair, played a considerable part in drawing attention away from her poor skin and rather dull eyes. He was also happy to see that the MacAllisters must have made an agreeable impression on Hester, for she smiled frequently at Betty and her mother. One contrast however, was apparent to all. Every one ate with gusto but Hester, she nibbled at this and dawdled over that. This strange indifference to such appetising food was lost on none of her three fellow diners, least of all on Mrs. MacAllister. The best appetite, needless to say, was Betty's; she chuckled over every dish. Time and again though, Mr. Lacy and Hester both noticed, she would ask her mother for permission to take such things as wine, coffee, and some of the table condiments. To every request her mother assented, until the dessert came. This time Betty asked:

“Mother, may I have pastry and ice cream both?”

“No, dear, you've had enough already. You may take one but not both. Which would you rather have?”

“Oh, mother, that's a hard question to answer. I think I'll take . . .”

“Can't she have the littlest one here, this tiny strawberry tart? That won't hurt her,” burst in Hester, smiling warmly at Betty.

“No, Hester dear,” answered Mrs. MacAllister firmly, also smiling. “Perhaps it will be better if I make up Betty's mind for her.” Then, turning to her daughter: “You will take some ice cream, won't you, darling.”



*Her mother writes PAID in red ink across the pages of
marks just settled for*

"Yes, mother, thank you." Mr. Lacy, of course, caught the full implication of this dialogue. His admiration bubbled over. He wished he could hug Betty close to his breast, for she was the loveliest little creature he had ever seen. Disciplined yet gay, cautious yet free, fearful yet courageous, respectful yet intimate—what a charming little bundle of paradoxes! All credit to the brilliant Eleanor MacAllister for what she had succeeded in proving: that these contradictory characteristics were by no means mutually exclusive! It was all he could do to curb the impulse to propose right away, but he consoled himself that it wouldn't suffer for waiting a day or two.

The sun was gone and the sky was overcast when they reached the broad verandah. Lacy pulled up chairs for Mrs. MacAllister and himself, the girls went to the porch rail and leaned over on the street below. The second step in Lacy's plan called for a heart to heart talk with Mrs. MacAllister about himself and Hester, but no proposal as yet. He realised that she knew nothing about his past or his present, nor had he touched on the problem of Hester's future. For the moment, however, he was taxing his brain for some pretext to get rid of the two girls.

"I feel heavy and lazy," began Eleanor, as she made herself comfortable in her chair. "I am afraid, Mr. Lacy, that your hospitality is too generous and lavish for comfort. What between the wine and the food . . ."

"Now look here, I had so much pleasure playing host that nothing you can say will . . ."

"Betty!" she called out. "Excuse me, Mr. Lacy. Betty, get down off that rail. Why don't you find yourself a chair? Take Hester and go look for some."

"Yes, mother, all right." She got down hastily.

Lacy recognised his opportunity.

"Why not let them take a walk, Mrs. MacAllister; I should like to talk to you about a number of things, particularly about Hester."

"Very well. Betty dear," she raised her voice again, "come here please."

Both girls approached. "On second thoughts, why don't you and Hester take a walk. It will do you good to walk down some of that enormous dinner."

"All right with me, mother. Would you like to come?" She looked at Hester.

"I don't think so. I'm too lazy. Let's find chairs and sit down."

Mr. Lacy was about to say something to his daughter when Mrs. MacAllister spoke up.

"Very well, dear. Go and sit down somewhere with Hester. But stay put, don't go running around. Try and sit where I can see you, dear, because I may want you for something."

A man and his wife, near the other corner of the porch, rose just then and Betty raced like a rabbit for the two chairs. Hester sauntered over and they both jammed their shoes between the posts of the railing.



FOR THE next hour, almost without interruption, Lacy spoke about himself, pleading the excuse that it was necessary in order to sketch in Hester's background. Mrs. MacAllister proved to be a sympathetic and attentive listener. In due time he came to the problem of Hester's reformation. He emphasised the fact that the girl was not wholly responsible for her bad traits, that the existence of some good ones tended to establish the proof that she was inherently of good character. He couldn't resist offering extenuating circumstances in his own behalf and, finishing that, began a subtle attack against the natural defences of a woman when she is the object of a man's desire. Fired with admiration for her competence, still more, admiring her as a person and a charming woman, he begged her to suggest ways of effecting a transformation in Hester's manners and outlook on life that would secure a healthy, a normal and a happy future for her. He hastened to deprecate, mildly, the application of such methods Mrs. MacAllister was employing with Betty, notwithstanding that the latter was living proof of its correctness, but pointed out that Hester was almost eighteen and too old now for that sort of treatment, unfortunately.

"I disagree with you on that, of course, but then you will say that I'm biased. Yet in my opinion the old adage that 'a girl is too old to be whipped when she's too old to be bad' is one of the soundest truisms in nature."

"You are not suggesting that such treatment could be successfully used with Hester?"

"Indeed, I am suggesting nothing less than that."

"Oh, that's impossible! Forgive me, I didn't mean to be so rude, but I am afraid you don't know Hester. Anything might happen if you used that, from hysteria to running away blindly to . . . to, God forgive me, attempts at suicide! No, Mrs. MacAllister, while I deeply regret—and am terribly envious, too—that Hester wasn't brought up like your Betty, I am afraid that, in this case, the patient wouldn't survive the cure."

"You will forgive my smiling at your distress, but your parental concern is really induced by sentiment which causes you to magnify the details of a case that is not at all unusual. On the contrary, an interested and intelligent parent should have the courage to attempt saving a girl like Hester from herself. As it is, she's her own worst enemy, unless it be her father! What do you suppose will be her end? Misery, frustration, chronic ill health, despair. That she's eighteen wouldn't bother me at all, no, not even if she was twenty or twenty-two. Those aren't ages to worry about. My sister and I got whipped up to the days of our marriage, she at twenty-three, I at twenty. There was no sentiment in our house about it; as soon as we did something wrong we got whipped, just as I whip Betty when she doesn't do as she's told. I admit the examples aren't identical because in Hester's case it would have to commence at eighteen instead of at eight, when it should have begun. Be sure that if it had, your mind now would be composed instead of agitated, and your pleasure in her would have been very much like mine in Betty."

"I retreat before every statement you make. I admit that I can't advance an argument against you; in fact, the more you talk the more remorseful I feel. Yet it's all so confusing. How would I go about it? Handicapped by a long record of indulgence, how would she react if I suddenly blurted out: 'Hester, I am going to whip you!' I would only end by making myself ridiculous. Even if I succeeded in getting her across my lap, I am sure I would bungle the whole thing. No, I am convinced that's impossible. If it were to be attempted at all it would have to be done by a thoroughly experienced person, by which I mean a woman, of course,—a man is unthinkable—and how would I go about finding such a one?"

At once he was aware that he had asked the most leading question of their entire short acquaintance, and he steeled himself for her reply.

"Now, Mr. Lacy, you've asked a question I can't answer. I honestly believe you would have a hard time finding the proper person. I suppose you could interview governesses and housekeepers, but you would doubtless find it discouraging work, like looking for a needle in a haystack. Besides, it's a method of trial and error that might only retard rather than advance, even produce disagreeable consequences. I have no hesitation in saying that you've come to the problem that is much harder to solve than making Hester over into a sweet, healthy and charming young lady.

"You're a likeable young fellow, Mr. Lacy, even if you're not such a successful parent. Oh, forgive me," her hand impulsively moved over

and clutched his arm, and her smile was warm. He made as if to reach for her hand, but it was as quickly withdrawn. "I would really like to help you, but I don't know how. The thought occurs that I might try suggesting a schedule of day-to-day procedure with Hester, but between giving that sort of advice and carrying it out there would be as big a gap as between writing down the points of a speech and delivering it."

"It's a rotten piece of luck that we didn't meet earlier in our lives. Oh say, I take that back! I'd be an ungrateful pup to talk about rotten luck. Meeting you now is perhaps the most wonderful piece of luck in my life. Your influence . . ."

"Now that's a wild exaggeration, Mr. Lacy, but I'm flattered just the same." She couldn't restrain a deep blush and that, in his eyes, gave her a new and stronger attraction than ever. "At any rate, what were you going to say about my tremendous influence?"

"I thought, if I may be so bold," and he blushed this time, "I might prevail on you to let us visit with you often; and I thought, Hester and you seeing each other more closely . . . Betty making friends with Hester . . ."

Suddenly Mrs. MacAllister leaned forward in her chair, but she wasn't looking at her companion. Instead, she was looking toward Betty who was teetering back and forth on the porch rail, her pretty legs swinging in unison. Hester was still in her chair, and both were giggling.

"Betty!" her mother called out sharply.

The girl looked over and stopped swaying.

"Come here, please," she beckoned with her finger.

Betty's mood changed as she walked forward, now there was a shadow across her face.

"Did I tell you a while ago not to sit or swing on the porch rail?"

"Yes, mother, you did. I'm sorry."

"Oh you'll be sorrier than that, my child. Will you please go to your room and wait for me."

Her face flushed and she started to go, but her mother's voice stopped her in her tracks.

"Don't you want to excuse yourself?"

"Yes, mother. Excuse me, Mr. Lacy." But by this time Hester, having observed Betty walking toward the lobby door, eyes downcast, was sufficiently curious to bestir herself and came forward.

"See you later, Hester. I have to go upstairs." She tried to affect a casual smile and waved her arm. Then she went into the lobby and disappeared.

"What happened, Mrs. MacAllister?" asked Hester. "Betty looked worried. Do you mind if I go after her, to your room?"

Her father jumped into the breach. "No, no! You stay down here with me!"

"I wasn't asking you, dad, I was asking Mrs. MacAllister if I could go to *her* room." She was annoyed. Her father, flushed with embarrassment, was about to say something when Mrs. MacAllister spoke.

"I think I'll go now." She rose and so did he. "You had better stay with your father, Hester. I have something I want to say to Betty, if you will excuse me."

"Will I see you when you come down?" he asked anxiously. "You know we didn't finish . . ."

"Yes, I know," she interrupted smiling broadly, looking more at Hester than at her father. "I think I'll be down again in about half an hour. Excuse me, please."

He followed her with his eyes in the lobby and saw her stop to chat with an old lady who was looking at semi-precious jewellery in a lobby case. Three or four different trains of thought were churning noisily around in his mind, and among them was what, if anything, to say to his daughter. She did her bit to make up his mind.

"I have an idea," she observed, "that Mrs. MacAllister can be a pretty disagreeable person without trying too hard. Seems to me Betty is afraid of her, or am I wrong?"

Yes, she did make up his mind for him, for he saw the futility of accepting the challenge of her observation. Just now what he wanted, most of all, was to be left alone.

"What are you thinking of doing now?" he asked, ignoring her remark.

"Oh, I dunno," she answered languidly.

"Why don't you go to your room and take a good nap. Perhaps we'll go to the theatre tonight."

"Maybe I will. It's half past four already, I don't think I want to walk on the boardwalk now. Maybe I will go up."

"Yes, go ahead, dear. Would you want me to knock at your door about six-thirty?"

"If you like."

She walked toward the hotel desk for her key and he began pacing the front and two sides of the verandah. Anyway, he was glad to get rid of Hester. He burned with impatience to propose marriage to Mrs. MacAllister, fondled a notion that she would accept, and was frantically hostile to the catastrophic idea of refusal. Every other minute he

peered into the lobby searching with his eyes the length and breadth of the big room for the extraordinary woman who was doubtless at this moment deliberately causing, with her own hands, intense physical distress to one of the most lovable young girls he had ever met.

His heart leaped when he saw his attractive friend talking to the young woman behind the cashier's window at the desk. She looked lovely and calm, and as fresh as a flower just come from a florist's ice box. She saw him too.

"Hello there!" she called. He rushed forward. "What did you do with Hester? Wait till I get my change and we'll sit down."

They went back to the porch, this time finding a whole choice of chairs.

"Where is Hester?" she repeated.

She went to her room for a nap, right after you walked out. But where is Betty, and what did you do with her?"

"Oh, I gave her a smart little whipping and left her lying, face down on the bed. When I walked out she was still sobbing quietly to herself."

"Poor kid!"

"Poor kid nothing! She knows she deserved what she got, and she didn't hesitate to acknowledge it, either. So you see, this unreasoning sentiment is really wasted."

"Perhaps you are right, but I can't help thinking of her vivacious and giggling an hour ago, and now those lively eyes are drenched in tears and her little body smarting from a severe punishment."

"A few alterations in that sad picture, if you will permit. In the first place, she'll probably get up in a few minutes, wash her tears far away with cold water as she always does; in the second place, it wasn't a 'severe' whipping. She merely got punished according to her offence, which wasn't the worst in the world, as you know. Betty would be the first to deny that it was a 'severe' whipping she just got, and she would be a reliable authority, I can tell you, for pointing out the differences between degrees of severity. I imagine you'll see her this evening, and you will find her as chipper as ever."

"Would it be an impertinence to inquire how you whipped her? The details, I mean?"

"Not at all. I can appreciate your personal interest. Well, first of all, when I came into the room she had already taken off her dress which she hung up in the closet, and her shoes which she put into shoe-trees before placing them also in the closet. From a drawer she had taken the strap and two canvas belts which she included in our luggage when we packed for the shore. These she had placed on the table between our twin beds. When I entered she was lying on the bed, on her side,

pulling on the knot of a piece of string she held between her hands."

Lacy, trying hard not to appear excited, interrupted.

"Then she knew what was inevitable when you merely told her to go to your room?"

"You bet. It's an old and familiar code signal."

"Was she crying already?"

"Not at all. Her eyes were dry but sad, of course. Then . . ."

"Just a minute. Pardon me. How did you ever succeed in training her to set the stage by herself, make . . . eh . . . everything ready, I mean? If I weren't hearing this from your own lips I wouldn't believe it possible."

"Oh, you may be sure it required many a rehearsal, you can call it *undress rehearsal*, if you like. She got many a hard whipping before she was really convinced it would pay her best to have everything ready before I came up. The strap, I can assure you, always wins out in the end. One just requires patience, a firm will, and a stout, but not a hard, heart."

"Yes, yes. Go on, please."

"Well, where was I? Oh yes, I said to her: 'All right now, get into position.' She stretched her body at full length in the centre of the bed. I went to the foot, reached over and pulled her girdle off. 'Hand me the belts,' was my next order. She reached over to the table and handed them back. I buckled the one around her ankles, then going to the head of the bed, I buckled the other belt around her wrists. The pillow I took from beneath her face while she lifted her head to make it easier for me. This pillow I tucked under her stomach in order to give her bottom a good elevation for the strap. My next order was, 'Hand me the strap!' She reached out for it, seized it, brought it to her lips and kissed it, then handed it to me."

"I declare!" he gasped. "Incredible!"

"Then I lashed her bottom and thighs with slow, measured, but well placed strokes for about five minutes. She cried, of course, wriggled and tossed a little bit, but never violently, and then it was all over. Her flesh was a deep red and she had received, I imagine, about one hundred hard, but not too severe, lashes."

"She never tried to beg off, or argue, or have the punishment diminished?"

"Never."

"What then? What happened next?"

"When I finished unbuckling the belts from her wrists and ankles I sat her up on my lap, as I always do, brushed the tears out of her eyes with my handkerchief, and asked her the usual questions. The conver-

sation was something like this:

‘What did I just whip you for, dear?’

‘For disobedience, Mommy.’ When she sits on my lap with her head on my breast, she invariably calls me Mommy.

‘Were you disobedient?’

‘Yes, I was, and I am sorry.’

‘Why did you swing on that rail, endanger your limbs, worry me, and endanger the hotel’s property as well?’

‘I was thoughtless, Mommy.’

‘But you were also disobedient. I had asked you an hour before to get off that rail and not sit on it again, but you paid no attention to my request. Now I whipped you for it. Have I treated you unjustly?’

‘No, Mommy, I deserved it. Thank you for whipping me.’ This last, which is obligatory, is always whispered down my breast as she puts her arms around my neck. She’s never been able to look me in the eyes for her blushing when she expresses thanks, and I’ve never insisted on it. Then she kisses me and I kiss her in return, after which she kisses the strap again, and I leave her alone until she composes herself.

‘You will observe there’s been no badgering, no undignified quarrelling or struggling, no excessive, unbearable punishment. A half hour or an hour later, she’s herself again, bright and chipper, lovely and lovable. There’s not an evil or a sulking thought in her head, and mother and daughter are the best and closest of good friends. Every problem, big and little, she instinctively runs to me with, knowing that she couldn’t go to a better or more sympathetic person in the world.’

‘No one ever accused me of having a stony heart, but how I wish that Hester had been in your charge these last ten years!’

‘Now please don’t use that silly expression ‘stony heart’; it has nothing to do with the case. Besides, it isn’t too late yet. Look around when you get back to the city. You have only begun thinking about it these last two days. Big problems like that aren’t solved over night; you must be patient.’

‘I guess you’re right. Look, it’s getting toward supper time. In view of the fact that we are only going to stay till the end of the week, won’t you and Betty sit with us in the dining room for the rest of our stay. You would make me very happy if you did.’

‘I would be very glad to, but don’t you think I’ll lose a little caste with the waiters? They’ll think I am a flirt.’ She laughed heartily.

‘Oh rubbish! At last I can charge you back with one silly remark! Am I glad!’

‘I’ll say this for you, you don’t lay your flattery on with a trowel.

You'd better hurry if you want to arrange that with the head waiter."

He grabbed both her hands and pumped them effusively, then rushed off toward the dining-room.



HESTER and her father awaited Betty and her mother as they came down the elevator. They were a stunning pair, Betty for her fifteen years almost as tall as her mother, both tastefully dressed with a superb aptitude for colour selection and harmony. Lacy didn't know who to look at more intently, mother or daughter. He didn't fail to observe, however, that Betty looked as fresh as a daisy. She greeted him and Hester with the utmost cordiality, saying to the latter:

"I am sorry I left you so abruptly this afternoon, Hester, but mother wanted me upstairs for something."

Lacy almost swallowed his tongue. Mrs. MacAllister squeezed Betty's hand affectionately. Had she been prompted by her mother to say this, and to say it this way?

They were a happy quartet at the dinner table, both sides being delighted with the amalgamation. Even Hester was amiable. At the fish course Mrs. MacAllister took Hester's plate and deftly separated skin and bones put them out of sight, and embellished what was left with table garniture.

"Try it this way, dear," she said.

Hester not only ate it all, but under the stimulus of more agreeable table surroundings than she usually had at home, did nearly as well with the other courses.

"You were saying," Eleanor looked at her father, "that Hester is an indifferent eater. Look how well she's done."

"But the answer, of course, is obvious," he quickly responded. "It's due entirely to your stimulating company and the equally stimulating example of Betty's appetite, to say nothing of her infectious charm."

"Oh mother, just listen to that," gurgled Betty between gulps of milk.

"We ought to make Mrs. MacAllister sign a contract to eat with us always, oughtn't we, Hester?"

"How would we do it, dad? Telescope one house into the other?"

"Got an answer for that?" he asked, turning to Eleanor. He was getting too bold, he feared.

"No, that's another one I can't answer."

"What's the matter?" persisted Hester.

"I guess you'd better ask your dad, he started this." She delicately straightened a wisp of the girl's hair.

Her father's forehead seemed to wrinkle in thought. Finally, he said, "I asked Mrs. MacAllister if she could tell me how to . . . how to unscramble eggs." He laughed foolishly, his eyes trying to find Eleanor's.

"It's beginning to get silly," remarked Hester pertly.

"Can't we go now, mother?" Betty interposed. "Let's argue on the verandah where it's cooler, if we can get chairs."

"You're right, dear. Let's go."

They were all laughing when they got out. Guests were milling around and there were only three chairs that could conveniently be pulled together. Only two were stuffed and these Betty passed to her elders. The third was an uncomfortable wicker chair with cane seat. Betty motioned Hester to sit in it.

"No, you take it yourself," Hester was all thoughtfulness. "This afternoon I made you stand while I sat, now it's my turn to stand." For answer Betty gently shoved Hester into it.

"I don't like that chair anyway," she said, with a rueful smile that only their elders perceived. "Now you sit!" She leaned her own back against the porch rail.

"Don't sit on the rail, Betty," warned Hester, trying to look solemn, "your mother doesn't like it."

"You're telling me!" That rejoinder passed the unsuspecting Hester altogether but Mrs. MacAllister barely succeeded in repressing a smile. As for Mr. Lacy, he had enough presence of mind to put his handkerchief over his mouth. The very next moment Betty sidled over to her mother and put her young arm around her neck.

"How would you all like to go to the theatre?" asked Mr. Lacy.

"Oh yes! Let's go, Mommy dear, huh?"

"All right darling. I don't know whether we can get tickets."

Lacy sprang out of his seat. "I'll either get them or set the place on fire!"

Two minutes later he returned from the lobby his face lit up.

"We're off!" he exclaimed.

At the theatre Mrs. MacAllister sat between Hester and Betty, with Mr. Lacy to Betty's left. Throughout the play, a comedy with many amusing scenes, Mrs. MacAllister paid more attention to Hester than to her daughter. Indeed, when they reached the street and Hester and her father walked together for a while, he was gratified to hear her remark:

"Maybe I was mistaken about her, dad. Except for the impression I

get that she keeps Betty right under her thumb, she has a lot of charm and she's very intelligent too. Been right nice to me today, I must admit."

"I am awfully glad to hear you say that, dear. As a matter of fact, you can have only a bare idea of what a really wonderful women she is. I've had several long talks with her and I can tell you I don't believe I've ever met anyone who has so successfully applied her intelligence and talents as she has."

"Haven't you noticed, though, that Betty seems to be afraid of her, or something?"

"What do you mean?" he countered.

"Well, there was that time this afternoon when she called Betty over because she was swinging on the porch rail and sent her upstairs, then she went up after her. I wonder what happened. Could she have been bawling her out for such a little thing? And then I've noticed at the table Betty asks, 'May I have some of this, mother', and 'May I have some of that'. Such obedience, my goodness! Seems a little soppy."

"Now that's not a nice thing to say, Hester. Whatever it is, just look at them. Did you ever see a more heart-warming couple? Is Betty a happy and lovable child, or isn't she? The results of Mrs. MacAllister's training speak for themselves, as you must admit, dear."

"That's just it. That's what puzzles me. They certainly are an affectionate pair. Betty seems to idolise her mother."

"It must be for a sound reason, then."

Betty and her mother joined them here and further speculations had to cease. All four sauntered leisurely back to the hotel, Betty leading the discussion about the merits and demerits of the play.

It was a beautiful evening. After an uneven day the clouds had vanished and the sky was illuminated by a three-quarter moon whose rays spread a silvery carpet over a quiet sea. A gentle breeze blew in across the water bringing health-producing ozone with every wave. It would have been an affront to nature to go to bed.

Lacy asked his three feminine guests if they wouldn't like to sit in rolling chairs on the boardwalk, against the rail, and watch the crowd go by for an hour. The invitation was promptly accepted, and they paired off, Eleanor and he in one chair, the girls in the other.

This was the moment he had been impatiently awaiting. If Eleanor was surprised to see him reach out and take her hand between his, it was nothing as an action compared to the words which burst in a torrential stream from his lips. The first jet was a proposal of marriage. Before she had a chance to answer a word he turned on a number of

high-pressure hoses all at one time. This one drenched her with praise, another with argument about home and comfort, a third with unsurpassed love and devotion, a fourth with protestations of absolute confidence, a fifth with solemn promises never to interfere with her management of either Betty or Hester, and so on until his breath left him.

"Say yes, Eleanor darling, and I'll expire from joy! Say no, and I'll be as crushed as a bug under a steam roller." He grabbed both her hands and squeezed them.

"Ouch!" she exclaimed. "You are killing me! That's a fine way to begin!" But her face was wreathed in smiles and the blood was high up in her cheeks.

"God forbid, Arthur,"—she was calling him Arthur—"that I should crush you to death! It's you that's crushing me. One more 'ouch' like the last and our children will be down on us. Can't we go somewhere so we can be safe from them? Before I say yes—or no—I have some questions to ask."

The manner in which she inflected her 'no' gave him a happier expectation than he ever dreamed he would achieve.

"And I'm burning with impatience to hear them. Could we go up to your room or mine without fear of disturbance by the children?"

"Let's try."

They got out of their chair and stepped over toward the girls. Mrs. MacAllister took charge of the situation. "Betty darling, we're going up to my room for a while. Wait for us here in this chair. We'll be back in a half hour."

"Is a half hour enough?" asked Arthur anxiously.

"Perhaps not, but if necessary we'll come down and put them off somewhere again. Maybe I'll send Betty to bed, it will be almost midnight anyway."

On reaching her room Eleanor invited Arthur to a chair, but he neither sat down nor gave her a chance to sit down. Instead, he crushed her in his arms while his lips sought hers. To his ineffable delight she did not pull away . . . The world was never more inviting, life was never more beautiful.

She had to disentangle herself finally to remind him that they couldn't spend all night in this room. Gently she pushed him toward a chair and refused point blank to sit on his lap.

"May I ask my questions now?" His imagination aided him to read happiness in her eyes too.

"Fire away!"

"All right. The picture of growing older together with you is a very alluring one, Arthur dear. I should like to make it a reality. We have known each other only several days, yet I can already say that no man I have met in my widowhood attracted me as you do. I feel flattered to know that you are having an identical experience. But there are a couple of very important questions about our children. Unless we find convincing answers to these questions in advance we are bound to produce unhappiness, and even misery, for four people."

"I assume, of course, that you wouldn't interfere between me and Betty. Is that correct?"

"Look, Eleanor darling, I welcome all your questions; more than that, I am eager for them. Now you keep asking them as they occur to you, and I promise to answer each one directly and without even the suspicion of evasion. Yes, you are absolutely correct. Not only will I not interfere, I have the greatest admiration of what you are doing to and with Betty. Moreover, to save possible embarrassment and complication, I shall gladly accede to whatever request you may make regarding my presence in the house when you are whipping Betty. What else?"

"We'll come to that later again, but thank you, dear, meanwhile. Now comes the main question: What shall we do about Hester? Particularly, what would you want me to do?"

"I've given a great deal of thought to that, and I can't honestly say that I have a good answer, but let me begin with one suggestion and see what you make of it. In the first place, let me say that her attitude to you has undergone a change. When you sent Betty upstairs she made free to remark that you could be a pretty disagreeable person when you wanted to. But tonight, coming out of the theatre, she was honest enough to acknowledge her mistake, and she spoke of you in a tone of admiration and respect. This was all of her own volition; no prompting from me. Which leads me to hope that, given a little time, you could so effectively impress your magnetic personality on her that she would actually welcome the prospect of seeing more and more of you."

"Now as to Betty. I don't know whether you would think it wise to give her any special instructions about her friendship with Hester, or whether you would be willing to rely on its natural development, but at any rate, I believe it would be important that they be thrown together much more often. And this is my suggestion how it is to be accomplished. But first of all, my wonderful friend, do you love me? Say that you love me," and he was already over her chair, kissing her hand, cheek, ear, even her hair.

Then he heard the most beautiful words in all the world

"Yes, Arthur darling, sweetheart, I do love you." This time it was she who covered his face with kisses. It was she who first had the presence of mind to think of the time.

"Hurry dear, we must go downstairs in a few minutes. Sit over there, please, I insist, and continue. You were saying you had some suggestions."

"Yes, sweet. Let us, perhaps tomorrow, announce our engagement to our children. I shall not suggest how you prepare Betty's mind, but I think I will omit the slightest intimation of your disciplinary talents when I talk to Hester. I shall merely repeat and repeat how wonderful you are as a mother and friend. Beginning with next week we must arrange that the four of us be together at least every night and as much as possible during the day, besides. The object is to let the children get used to us while we use the opportunity to capture their confidence. When we feel satisfied they trust us we shall set the wedding date not further than a week or two beyond."

"We must go down, sweetheart," Eleanor rose. "Come. As soon as we have disposed of the children, I shall want to ask some more questions about Hester."

Betty, of course, was summarily dispensed with. Her mother told her kindly and quietly that it was time for her to go to bed, and Betty dutifully obeyed, bidding goodnight to all. With Hester there was some argument until Eleanor craftily broke in to say she thought she ought to write some letters before retiring, reminding Arthur that he promised to write that letter for her to that "firm in Chicago" she had spoken to him about. Arthur caught the cue at once, apologised for having to be reminded, and started off for the writing desks, Eleanor behind him.

With that Hester threw up the sponge, announcing she reckoned she might as well go to bed.

"How I hate such subterfuges!" exclaimed Eleanor as soon as Hester was out of sight, "but I guess I'll have to forgive myself on the score that diplomacy demands it for the present."

"I am sorry too, dear, but we can't afford to be patient for much longer. We have such a hopeful future before us. Now where were we?"

"What would you want me to do with Hester beginning with the date of our marriage?"

"The way you frame this part of the question is so simple that it suggests an obviously simple answer. I hope you will be strictly impartial in your attitude to the two girls, demanding nothing from the one that

you wouldn't demand from the other, and giving to Hester whatever you give to Betty, and that means the bitter as well as the sweet. You have my sincere promise that I shall not interfere, except to coöperate with you when and how you suggest it be done. In any case, I shall do nothing you won't wish me to do. I know, of course, that you will not fail to give steady consideration to Hester's retarded development, as compared to Betty's advanced training."

"You're a darling. If we were in some place less public than the bright lobby of a hotel, I would kiss you. But I owe you one that I'll let you collect the first chance we get. Anyway, knowing how confidently I can count on your support, I hope I'll be able to accomplish our aim with Hester. What is her weakness, by the way? I should have to know that first of all."

"If you mean what does she like most, I don't know that she has any preference. As I already told you, she's indifferent about everything people naturally make a fuss about. But if you mean, is she sensitive about or to anything, then the answer is decidedly yes. She is very sensitive about her skin. I am sure she would be a friendlier sort of person, more tolerant, more alive, if her skin were to clear up. I have no doubt she could even be made to draw energetically on her will power, by way of sacrifice, if she thought she could permanently improve the colour and tone of her skin. The world would be a brighter place for her and she would be a brighter person in it."

"Good. That gives us something to work on at once. I am sure some ideas will suggest themselves to me after a few days of thought. Now let me make you a pledge that I shall repeat to her when the occasion arrives. She will find me, I hope, an uncommon type of stepmother. She will find that here is one stepmother who doesn't discriminate in the slightest degree in favour of her own daughter. I shall even try to love her as my own, although I can't promise, and she must not expect, that I can at the beginning bear the same degree of love for her that I have for Betty. To approximate that, Hester herself will have to help me."

"This is a hell of a place!" blurted Arthur. "Let's get out. Let's walk on the boardwalk. If I can't take you in my arms, if I can't hold you close and tell you what a wonderful girl you are . . . Heavens! Let's walk!"

It was after two o'clock when he left her at her door. A hasty kiss, vexatious to both ardent lovers, was all they could exchange in the corridor, and Eleanor stole in to the twin bed beside her soundly-sleeping daughter. Neither Eleanor nor Arthur slept well, however, their minds

being much too active to give them repose. In fact, Arthur acknowledged the next morning that he scarcely closed his eyes. Alternating a pipe between innumerable cigarettes he walked the floor until nearly dawn weighing one plan against another.



THEY had no trouble getting rid of the girls in the morning after all had breakfasted. Broken though both were from lack of sleep, their minds were still not unproductive of ideas. Off in a secluded corner, free from eavesdropping strollers, they resumed discussion of their problems. The first thing they did was to abandon any thought of forced attempts to bend Hester's will to that of her stepmother. They were repelled by the prospect of noisy scenes, violent threats and all the consequent bad blood. To begin with, then, it was tentatively agreed that after dinner he should take Hester for a walk in one direction, she to take Betty in another. During this walk with their daughters they would confide their love for each other and their determination to marry at an early date.

It was anticipated that Betty would be the most worried, but Eleanor was confident that her great psychological, more than her disciplinary, influence over her child would aid her in allaying the girl's fears. It was further agreed to promise Betty that her whippings would be administered in private, at least at the beginning, although it would be obviously impossible to conceal from Hester and her stepfather the fact that she was whipped. Eleanor felt she could also manage Betty if the child had an emotional reaction to a permanent 'intrusion' into her special relations with her mother in the matter of discipline. She could argue cogently that since two families, the Gilmores and the Kents, knew all about her whippings it couldn't be such a tragedy if the Lacs also knew it, particularly since the latter would now be so intimately related in all other respects. Finally, she would present it as a challenge of the child's sincere devotion if she was prepared to spoil her mother's chance for the love and companionship of a man she loved deeply in return.

Arthur, for his part, was temporarily to have the easier task. He would simply tell Hester of his discovery that he was madly in love with Betty's mother, that his love was fully reciprocated, that they would actually marry in a month or so, and that after all these dreary years he had at last found the one companion of his dreams. He planned to

make as eloquent a plea as he could for his daughter's coöperation, and urge her to be as thoughtful and tactful with her stepmother as he was sure the older woman would be with her. He would ask, above all, that she study her ways and be mindful of her advice. It was only necessary to look at Betty to see what a successful mother she was, and the girl herself should be an inspiration to Hester all the time.

According to this plan it would have been a foolish and a dangerous step to acquaint Hester with the discipline Betty was obliged to undergo from her mother. They decided to stake everything on time. Word by word, piece by piece, Hester would learn what made Betty such a good girl. Even the first shock, when she discovered that Betty was actually being whipped with a leather strap on her bottom, would not be an overwhelming one when it came. She would be overcome by surprise, perhaps, but not by alarm or panic. Anyway, no such outrage was being attempted on her, and that thought should be her immediate comfort.

Eleanor supplied additional details of their theory with regard to the first few months.

"Let's not forget that even after she's had her first shock she will still not be able to cast off the knowledge of what is occurring. If she tries assuming a supercilious attitude toward Betty she will have scant personal satisfaction out of it, because Betty—and I shall see to that—will take no affront at this attitude. If she tries to avoid discussing it with Betty she will find her efforts wasted, because not only from her but from her girl friends, Janet Gilmore and Alice Kent, she will be hearing continually on the subject of whippings and spankings. What's more natural than for those three girls to put that subject on the top of their list whenever they get together? To avoid listening to, or participating in, those conversations she will have to cut herself off from the main stream of our social life. If the spanking atmosphere isn't infectious, she will at any rate have to fret over the implication, if not the charge direct, that she's a pretty bad sport, not to say an unsociable person. And living under the same roof with a girl who gets frequently whipped, she will have plenty of opportunity to observe the admirable composure of the recipient before and after, if not during, the whipping, and the calm and curiously un-tragic manner in which the whole business comes off.

"In addition," Eleanor continued, "we can count on Betty's naturally happy temperament, as well as on her frank, generous and honest nature, to disarm Hester's belligerency. She will be hard put to maintain consistently a hostile attitude with that child around, if you don't

mind my boasting. After all, you know, I am proud of her. For the same reasons, I don't think it will be necessary to suggest or imply to Betty that she coöperate with me in the winning over of Hester. As a matter of fact, it might reflect on me to do so, and we shall be better off if we depend on nature to take its course."

All these plans Arthur unhesitatingly endorsed. The conference then turned to the question of a new home. Here too they saw eye to eye on the type of home they wanted. Their preference was for a two-storey home in the suburbs, with private garage. In Croton Woods the houses were particularly desirable. Each was surrounded by a generous piece of ground, and besides a maid's room and bath off the kitchen, the upper story generally had three bedrooms and two baths. This arrangement provided a guest chamber, since they intended that the two girls share a large bedroom in which they purposed to put twin beds.

Arthur raised the question of domestic help, and Eleanor said she would bring along Jennie, a coloured woman she had employed for nearly ten years. Jennie did her cooking, most of her cleaning, also waiting on table; the laundry was sent out. Jennie did not sleep in. She had a husband who was incapacitated by a chronic ailment, and she and her only son, age twenty-six, who drove a produce truck, provided the means of a modest living.

Yes, Jennie knew all about Betty's whippings, but she was the best pal a feller had. She had an extraordinary talent for consoling the girl without ever criticising mother or daughter. Mother was always right, Betty was always wrong, yet with her limited vocabulary she managed to restate these propositions each time in so convincing a manner that no one, unless it be Hester, could gainsay it.

Arthur was delighted to hear that this treasure was coming into their home, but he observed that Jennie, for all her willingness, could not handle the new house alone, besides twice as many people.

"That's true," agreed Eleanor, "and here's another problem we shall have to solve correctly. I am afraid we shall require another girl, a general house servant, I should say; one to make the beds, clean the rooms and in other ways assist Jennie."

"This one would sleep in of course, since we will have a maid's room and bath. She will also have to know about the girls."

"That's just it. Which means we don't want to take in an average, run-of-the-mill houseworker. I think I'll speak to Mrs. Gilmore about it when I get back to town. Not long ago she told me something about a nice German girl who answered her advertisement for a maid a year

or more ago. That was the time she took Hilda, a Swedish girl she's very pleased with. She was struck by the German girl's shyness and her eagerness for the job which penetrated through, nevertheless. Aside from the fact that she said they were a large family of eight, she recalled nothing else about her. If Mrs Gilmore still has her address I should like to have a talk with her even if she already has a job.

"And talking about her reminds me of something else. Mrs. Kent was telling me of a sight she witnessed while doing her social work with a family on the second floor of an old tenement house downtown. On the other side of the street is an ancient two-storey wooden fire trap housing a large German family also. The father, a man of about forty-five, who gave every visible proof of being a ne'er-do-well type, was whipping one of his sons, a lad of thirteen or fourteen. He had the boy down over a bench with his knee crooked in the hollow of his victim's back to keep him from bouncing around. He was a stout youngster with a broad back and wide, chubby bottom. His father was laying it on with a riding-crop, no less, and it was a pretty serious whipping because Mrs. Kent could see dark weals along the boy's thighs. Watching the performance was the boy's mother and a daughter about twenty years old. The mother appeared nonchalant about it, but the girl pulled nervously at a cheap bracelet on her arm as the boy wriggled and cried for relief. A startled expression could be seen on her face which in repose should not have been unattractive. Across the narrow street one should imagine these neighbours would know each other intimately, but the woman Mrs. Kent was visiting said she knew nothing about that German family. I was thinking I might run that clue down, perhaps the girl is suitable for maid's work. A girl like that should appreciate a good, quiet, well-ordered home. She might make a loyal servant and we would be doing her an inestimable good."

"I am thinking, sweetheart, that under the compulsion of your irresistible personality it would be no time before you have three girls to whip. Do you suppose, between licks, you'd find a chance to love just a poor, self-effacing fellow, the only male in the house?"

She burst out laughing, leaned quickly over and kissed his ear. She didn't get away without a return kiss hard on the mouth. He would have held on were it not for the uncertainty of their so-called seclusion. To be sure, the thought of holding this conference in one of their bedrooms hadn't escaped either of them, but they had to curb their impatience to make love* unmolested for a more favourable time. With their daugh-

* It goes without saying that this expression does not bear the crude connotation accorded to it by a later and more degenerate era.



*The stroke landed flat across the bottom and imprinted
a pink outline of the instrument's shape*

ters somewhere around there was no telling when one or the other might come bursting into their room, and they still preferred to fix their own time for announcing the nature of their interest in each other.

"Oh, you poor dear," she said, trying to look sad. "It will be up to you to make yourself heard, won't it?"

"Think I'll be able to above the song of the strap? Looks to me as though you'll be no sooner polishing up one fair bottom than you'll be starting on another."

"Maybe you'll pinch hit after a while, when you get on to the technique?"

"When it comes to puns you're as human as the rest, I see. Anyway, I think we're running ahead of ourselves, but maybe I'll take the job of assistant supervisor, if I can get it, that is. But do you hear what I hear? Aren't those the familiar voices of our beautiful daughters round the band?"

They got up and looked toward the main lobby, and there were the two girls inquiring at the desk for either their keys or their parents. After questions back and forth had been answered on both sides they made ready for dinner.

At the table Hester was once more the object of Eleanor's inconspicuous attention, and all, particularly Arthur, were gratified with his daughter's improved appetite. They left the dining-room in the perfect holiday mood, gay and relaxed. In the centre aisle of the lobby Eleanor found the opportunity to recommend to Arthur that they take the girls to their respective bedrooms, rather than for a walk as originally planned. Arthur acquiesced. He asked Hester to come upstairs with him for a while, she did the same with Betty.

Hester never gave anyone a greater surprise in her life than her father when he saw the agreeable manner in which she accepted the news. She didn't even appear to be greatly surprised. He expected and had made himself ready for all sorts of arguments and he got none. Hester said she could see that he had gone 'daffy', but she didn't blame him very much. Mrs. MacAllister was a pretty clever woman, attractive, considerate when she wanted to be, the kind of person that inspired confidence. She hoped he'd be very happy, she had long thought he needed a wife, for he never seemed to be able to find himself—this from Hester! As to the stepmother relation, she promised to give Eleanor a decent break if she got one in return. Yes, and the more she saw of Betty the more she liked her. The only thing she couldn't

understand about the girl was her invariable unwillingness to do anything unless she first obtained her mother's permission. Seemed so over done, that's all; otherwise she was a swell girl. And by the way, what should she call her stepmother, his wife-to-be? Arthur surmised that 'Aunt Eleanor' might be the best form of address, they would consult about it later. He told Hester, of course, that by previous arrangement Betty was simultaneously hearing the announcement from her mother's lips in their bedroom. He suggested they go down in the lobby and see if they were already there. They weren't.

Interestingly enough, yet natural under the circumstances, what should have been an argument never took place, and where arguments were as unknown as democrats in Maine, there was something very like one. Anyway, if it wasn't an argument, it was certainly a discussion. Betty was worried and was seeking assurances.

"But, mother, suppose Uncle Arthur was to hear me get whipped? I would die!"

"That's what you said, dear, when I first brought home the strap we now use. And you didn't die, did you? And the time I whipped you so hard with the birch rod for lying to me you kept hollering that you were dying. By this time you take the strap for granted, and after three or four whippings with birch rods you no longer expect to die when they put your bottom in a state. What I am trying to say is that Uncle Arthur has to be present no more than twice or three times and you will start taking him for granted too. Anyway, I promise that I am not going to let him see you get whipped until after you and he have known each other for quite a little while."

"Thanks, mother, that's a help anyway. And what about Hester? What shall I tell her?"

"For the present you don't have to tell her anything. In fact, you will be wiser not to, my suggestion being that we let things take their natural course. You will help yourself best, and me also, if you will just be good friends. I shall help you with her, dear, you can depend on that."

"Now, mother, do you know the thing I am most curious about?"

"Yes, darling, I think I do."

"All right, then tell me. I want to see if you really know"

"You are curious to know whether I intend to whip Hester."

"That's just it, mother!"

"I certainly do, but not right away. She's a nice girl in many respects but she's been terribly spoiled. For you, dear, she can serve as an example of what your shortcomings might have been, and which thank goodness and a leather strap, you are free from. Let me tell you that

when we all get to know each other better I shall certainly not show any partiality. A fine state of affairs, if I should find both of you guilty of something, then should take you over my lap and give you a painful whipping, and say to her, 'Now that wasn't a nice thing to do, Hester; please don't do it again.'

"And there is still another reason why I intend whipping her. I am going to try saving her from herself, cure her of her self-indulgence, self-interest, stubbornness, disrespect to her father, and a few other things. For none of these is the poor girl to blame. It wasn't her fault, her neglectful parent is to blame entirely. I also want to try demonstrating to all of us that I can build her up, make her put on necessary weight, give her attractive feminine curves where they are so much needed, and cure her skin condition through right living, discipline and sacrifice. In a word, I shall try to make her nearly as charming and as beautiful as you, my darling baby." She pulled her over on her lap and kissed her fondly on each cheek. Betty put her arms tight around her mother's neck and sunk her head between her ample breasts. It was her favourite position after a whipping.

"Come, baby, let's go down, they must be waiting for us."

"Why don't you have them come up here, then we could all congratulate each other."

"Oh, that's a fine idea, darling! Are you smart? Whatever made me arrange to meet in the lobby afterward! I'll phone down right this minute."

"What shall I say, mother? What shall I do when they come up?"

Her mother wasn't paying any attention to her, she was already speaking to the operator. Two minutes later the Lacy's entered. Betty ran forward to greet Hester, arms spread wide open.

"Congrats, sister Hester!" She flung her arms around her neck and began kissing her. Hester returned her kisses warmly.

"Oh dear, such a word!" Eleanor was beaming, her daughter not listening for the first time in a long while.

The next minute this impulsive, warm-hearted child had her arms around Arthur's neck, calling him 'Uncle Arthur'. At that moment she could have been no less dear to him than her mother.

Somebody suggested a drink and Arthur bounced forward to the phone. Meanwhile Hester had already approached Eleanor, and taking her cue from Betty addressed her at once as 'Aunt Eleanor'. They also wrapped their arms around each other and kissed a number of times.

Everybody was very happy.



THE rest of the afternoon they spent in Eleanor's room chatting, bantering one another and having a jolly good time about it. After supper Arthur suggested hiring an automobile and taking them all for a ride. Now he regretted he hadn't brought his car down. Toward midnight they stopped at a small roadhouse, all four admitting they were hungry again, despite the big supper. The place had a dinky four-piece orchestra and Arthur was obliged to dance with three women, no less. Again it was about three o'clock in the morning before he actually put his happy but weary head on his pillow.

The next day was Friday and it was the best day of the week. One had only to look at that sky to see that at last there would be no uncertainty about the weather today. They all slept late and there was no breakfast when, one at a time, they came down. In fact, they had little more than an hour to wait before dinner would be served. So they all strolled along the boardwalk and had merely a glass of orange juice. At dinner they decided to get into their bathing suits and spend the rest of the afternoon on the beach for a change.

It was the first time Eleanor saw her prospective stepdaughter in a bathing suit. She was wearing one of those novelty wool one-piece affairs with a half skirt effect. The colour was blue and white, the yarn having that rubber treatment which makes the suit fit like a corset. The girl's figure appeared to much better advantage than it did in street clothes. It deserved a rating much below perfect, to be sure, but it gave promise, her limbs being nice and straight, her breasts, waist and hips in proportion to each other but still too narrow for her height. If she carried ten or twelve additional pounds and spread that addition over the proper places through care and exercise, thought Eleanor, she would have quite an attractive figure.

Desiring to be off by themselves they walked toward the breakwater again, and selecting a suitable spot, spread themselves out in comfort. They sunned themselves for an hour then Hester suggested they go in for a swim. At the water's edge they kept together, but presently Hester and Betty, the latter leading, swam off toward the more populated section of the water front. In the ocean they were soon lost to view of their parents, who paid not too much attention being so much absorbed in each other. When they emerged and started walking up the sand, Eleanor discerned the two at the far left watching a group of four

young men doing acrobatics. Around this central group were some other boys doing somersaults, chasing other boys and girls around and otherwise carrying on in high jinks.

Arthur and Eleanor proceeded to the spot where they left their beach things and sat down. After chatting a few minutes she got restless about the girls, rose and walked in the direction of the sea. Arthur came walking along, some paces behind. Suddenly, Eleanor pointed to her left.

“Now just see what Betty’s doing!” she exclaimed. A fellow, his legs far apart, the right one crotched at the knee, was holding Betty up on the side of his thigh. His left hand was clutching her ankle, his right arm was around her waist, and she was trying to balance herself on him by extending her right leg in the air as far as it would go. A few boys and girls were gathered about the couple, and in the forefront was Hester on her hands and knees. While her father and his *fiancé* looked on the scene from a distance, several boys began somersaulting over Hester’s back. She didn’t seem adverse to this play for she made no attempt to alter her position. Their eyes shifted back and forth between their children, and suddenly they saw Betty lose her balance and tumble head over heels in the soft sand. The crowd laughed while she picked herself up. Straddling her legs far apart, one hand on each hip, she joined in the laughter and began watching the antics of others.

“I’ll guarantee she won’t laugh after I get through with her,” said Eleanor grimly, locking her arm in Arthur’s elbow. “The idea of allowing herself to be handled by a bunch of boys, and boys she didn’t even know a half hour ago! She seems to have forgotten whom she has to account to, but I’ll improve her memory for her all right. To say nothing of the risks she’s taking, she might break her bones, the reckless thing!”

“To a large extent, dear, your irritation should embrace Hester too. I must say I am surprised, I never saw her do anything like that on the beaches. She’s always so prim and quiet and unsociable.”

“Perhaps it’s Betty’s example.”

“Maybe. Still, although this is not a good example, getting so clubby all of a sudden with strange boys, I am very happy at the prospect of letting Betty set her examples. I feel sure it will make the girl human at last.”

“Aye, that it will, both of us helping, you know.” Her naturally good humour had quickly returned. It was the first time he heard her use a Scotch accent, and she did it so deliciously that he unhooked her arm and put his very tightly around her waist until she protested feebly that he was choking her.

“Listen, darling, I’d like to know how you are going to handle this

business of punishing Betty and forgiving Hester. They're both equally guilty, you know."

"They are indeed. But I've already taken care of that, and there will be no hard feeling on Betty's part. That's one of the things I explained to her yesterday. As for Hester, I suggest you say a word or two to her yourself. I suppose you will have to expostulate with her on the inadvisability of letting strange young men maul her around." She tickled his ribs with her beautifully shaped fingers.

"Oh Eleanor! Oh Hester! That ye both have come to this!" He clasped the fingers of his hands, assumed a lugubrious expression, and swayed from right to left. She cupped the elbow of her right arm in her left hand and followed him with her eyes. He made as if to grab her but she twisted out of his reach, then let herself be caught. They held each other tight.

"If you've finished your lamentations," she said, rubbing her chin against his arm, "perhaps you would raise your beautiful voice and call those two sinners."

"I don't know, maybe we ought to let them keep sinning a while, they seem to be having such fun at it."

"Are you implying, sir, that sin is fun?" she said, pulling away, a pretended look of fright in her sparkling eyes.

"Oh no, indeed! Perish the thought! But let them play awhile, yes?"

"Very well, padre. It shall be as you say."

"When are you going to perform your operation, before or after supper?" he asked.

"Before, if I can manage it. If I whipped her after supper it would kill the evening for her."

"Do you think she'll appreciate your consideration while she's being tanned?"

"Not 'while' of course, but before and after, sure she will."

"I keep trying to pity her, because she's such a lovable youngster. In fact, I love her so much already that I wouldn't hesitate to defend her with my life against injury. But when I see how beautifully she survives these very painful sessions, pity seems so ridiculous."

"Darling, I am so happy to hear you say you love her. Gosh! I could squeeze you to death for it if no one was looking. But pity is ridiculous, really. The fact is she thrives on my discipline! Each whipping stimulates her blood, exercises her whole body, steels her nerves, puts colour in her skin, keeps her body lithe, agile, limber, and trains her mind to be alert. So you see how wasted and misplaced is any sympathy or pity. What she and I deserve are congratulations, my sweet love!"

"And by the Lord Harry, you shall have them! Not only once but now and forever, morning, noon and night till the day I die. Hit me over the head with a baseball bat if I ever open my mouth against your whipping anyone."

"All right. Don't forget to buy me that bat." She stepped back, made two fists, and placing one over the other began practising shadow swinging.

"Yes, dear. Shall I have a corrugated iron leg fitted over the end?"

"Not unless it's rusty, darling. But look, don't you think we had better call a halt to that party over there? It's getting late, and I think they've had enough jumping around. We all ought to take a dip again before going in."

"Yes, dear, I'll call them. Wait a minute." And he ran off in the direction of the girls. They happened to see him coming and he waved for them to quit and come back. The circle of stunt performers had actually diminished by this time, and they needed only the reminder of Arthur's appearance to begin making farewells. That took less than a minute and the girls began running back. When they got to their beach quarters they were breathless not only from racing but from their previous exertions as well.

"You shouldn't have played with those strange boys, Hester," her father began. "Such rough games too. I don't like your letting boys you never met before grab you all over and throw you around."

"Oh, it was nothing, dad. They were harmless, and we had a good time anyway."

But the conversation between Betty and her mother, taking place at the same time, was somewhat different.

"That has nothing to do with the case, Betty," she was saying. "My heart was in my mouth when I saw you balancing on that wild boy's thigh. Besides, I repeat, you didn't ask me, neither you nor I know these boys, and the games you played were not only dangerous but most unladylike, shall we say. Come, we are all going in just to rinse off, no swimming around, mind you, and then you're going right upstairs and wait for me."

"Yes mother, I am sorry." Betty's mood had changed entirely. She spoke humbly and looked sad.

During this conversation Arthur made himself busy rubbing sand off his hands and legs. Hester stood by saying nothing, but no doubt wondering what it was all about. When they came out of the water she heard Betty being reminded by her mother to 'get going', and the next voice was that of Betty asking Hester and her father if they would excuse

her, she had to go in right now, she would see them all later. At the first opportunity, when Eleanor couldn't overhear, Hester demanded:

"What's the grand idea, dad? Is Aunt Eleanor sore at Betty just because she had a little fun? What's this business I'm always hearing of 'Go upstairs, I'll see you later'?"

Her father was evasive. "Why don't you ask Betty that question? Maybe Aunt Eleanor wants to scold her, or something."

"Oh, I see. And she doesn't want to do it down here. Darn considerate, I must say," she tried to put a lot of sarcasm into that surmise. "I think it's terrible to be scolded for this and for that all the time. I can't believe it of her, Aunt Eleanor seems too wise a person for that sort of stuff."

By this time the subject of her speculation was back with them, and Arthur seized the advantage to suggest they all go to their lockers. "We've had enough of the beach for one day. Don't let's try to make up for the previous bad weather all at one time."

They parted at the bath house, Eleanor and Hester going in one direction, Arthur in the other. Before leaving he asked Eleanor to come down to his room when she was 'through'. They could all meet down there before supper anyway, since Hester and her father had rooms next to each other.



WHEN Eleanor opened her door she found her dutiful daughter lying on the bed. She was wearing only two brief garments, a lacy pink bra and a French tailored pink silk knickers. On the little table between their twin beds lay the famous strap and the two canvas belts. The strap was less than a yard long and less than one-half inch wide. In thickness it was about one quarter of an inch. The colour was black and the texture of the leather so glossy that even an uninitiated person could have seen that such a finish could only have been produced by long or frequent use. At the moment her mother entered Betty was listlessly turning the pages of a fashion magazine. She closed it and shoved it under the pillow, then she folded her arms above her head. In this position, lying on her stomach and stretched at full length, she gave the appearance of trying to conceal her face from the world.

Eleanor took her time. She proceeded, first, to distribute her bathing articles, putting each thing in its proper place. Then she walked to the

mirror and began to re-comb her hair. Not a word, meanwhile, was exchanged between mother and daughter, not even a hello. In due time she got to the edge of Betty's bed, reached over and tapped the calf of her bare leg.

"All right. Stretch out." These were her first words.

The girl moved her body around until it was straight in the centre of the bed. Her mother walked to the foot of the bed, reached forward, and pulled the girl's knickers off, getting voluntarily the necessary assistance. The next order followed quickly.

"The belts, please."

Betty reached forward to the table, clasped the belts and handed them back. One Eleanor buckled around the ankles, then walking to the head of the bed, buckled the other belt over the wrists. Betty then raised her head so her mother could take the pillow from under it. This pillow her mother adjusted under the girl's hips, causing her bottom to jut upward and tautening the skin over it. This had the effect of placing the girl's bottom at the most advantageous angle for receiving the whip, at the same time intensifying the pain because of the tightened skin surface. The next order was the worst.

"The strap, please."

It was promptly handed back in the same manner, although this time Betty had to reach for it and kiss it with her manacled wrists. Her mother stood off at an experienced angle and began to wield the strap. Until this moment, the girl's bottom, thanks to the manner in which she was fixed, still had the matchless colour of pink-veined marble, and was as cool, smooth and firm. Perhaps because they were so favourably exposed both cheeks had the amplitude of a matured woman; no one, not seeing the girl's face, could have imagined this was the posterior of a girl only fifteen years old.

But the strap quickly began to put the magnificently developed muscles in her bottom into fierce action. Eleanor whipped with a thoroughly experienced rhythm, calculating the increasing strength of each lash with a mathematical precision, and landing each stroke methodically against her well-known target with the sureness of a Texas Ranger. Betty cried out with each hit, but it was a controlled, a *disciplined*, crying. An observer could have seen that, in the violent jerking of her bottom and thighs, she was still just as sensitive to the pain of the strap as though it were her first whipping. This afternoon, too, she was getting a little extra dosage for the reasons already enumerated, and the proof of that was becoming more and more visible as the colour of the flagellated skin turned to a deep and angry violet-red.

But all credit to the disciplined and to the disciplinarian, for not once during the punishment did Betty beg her mother to cease. More credit to them still, for only when the last lash fell did Betty give way to a long series of gasping sobs that raced intensely upon one another. The muscles in her enflamed bottom still continued to quiver, but now her entire frame began to vibrate from the reaction.

Her mother laid the strap on the bed alongside her face and unbuckled her ankles. Immediately her freed legs started kicking back in a futile effort to rub her swollen bottom with the soles of her feet; it was to no avail of course. Eleanor did not free Betty's wrists, for the obvious reason that she was thus prolonging the girl's punishment by preventing her from using her hands to allay the blaze in her flaming posterior.

While Betty sobbed to herself her mother walked into the bathroom for a few minutes and when she returned, her nose powdered, her dress pulled straight, she looked as unflustered as though she had just finished her toilet after a restful nap. Next she went to the closet and started laying out some of Betty's clothes suitable for evening wear. By the time she was finished with this—altogether she hadn't consumed more than twenty minutes—Betty's crying had subsided to a mere sniffling, although her legs still kept tirelessly shifting from position to position, the best evidence that the pain hadn't subsided even if the crying had.

Now that her mother had completed her little tasks she approached Betty and unbuckled the wrist belt. The girl's hands shot out swiftly, like flight pigeons when released, and as unerringly found the tender cheeks of her suffering bottom. While Betty rubbed as hard and fast as she could, her mother went for a straight-backed chair which she pulled over near the bed. Then she sat down.

During the entire whipping, and up to this point, not a single word had been exchanged!

"I am ready now, dear. Come over here to me." These were the first words uttered since the pain-promising order: "The strap, please."

Betty rose promptly, the cheeks in her face almost as red as those on her bottom. She sat herself gingerly on her mother's lap, trying to put the weight on her lower thighs and keeping her pained bottom extended outside to avoid as much contact as possible. Lifting her head up, which had a tendency to droop, her mother began drying the wet tears with her own handkerchief. With the other arm she was holding Betty around the waist.

"What did I whip you for, dear?" she began.

"For . . . for playing with strange boys," she was still not composed.

“And what else?”

“For letting them touch me.”

“And what else?”

“For . . . for risking my life.”

“Well, not quite that, darling, but you certainly might have broken a leg or arm in your recklessness.” She smiled and pulled her closer.

“Now what else?”

No answer.

“What else did I whip you for?”

“I can’t think, Mommy.”

“Did you ask my permission to play with those boys?”

“That’s right. No, Mommy, I didn’t.”

“And don’t I always have to approve of your companions first?”

“Yes, Mommy.”

“You were disobedient too, weren’t you?”

“Yes, I was disobedient, too.”

“Then do you think I punished you unjustly for these offences?”

Betty raised her arms and folded them around her mother’s neck. Her head sank down upon the older woman’s full and firm breasts, then she drew a deep breath.

“No, Mommy, I deserved it. Thank you for whipping me.” Her lips grazed her mother’s chest as she made her formal avowal. A moment or two later she removed one arm from her neck and let it brush the top of the bed, her eyes still averted from it. Her fingers found the strap and her hand closed around it. She brought the faithful instrument of her discipline to her lips and placed a kiss about half way down its side. Her eyes were still shut as her lips moved upward till they found her mother’s, and upon those lips which so often pronounced sentence of corporal punishment upon her, she placed a long and affectionate kiss.

“It’s almost six o’clock, sweetheart, and I can only let you rest for about a half hour if we are not to keep Uncle Arthur and Hester waiting too long. Well, maybe I can let you stay in bed until a quarter to seven. I’ve already laid out some clothes for you for supper to save you time. I don’t know whether I’ll be able to come back, but if I don’t I’d like you to meet us in Uncle Arthur’s room at seven sharp. Make yourself nice and fresh looking now, if you want to avoid an uncomfortable session with Hester.”

“Yes, mother, I understand.” She was lifting one heavy leg after the other back into bed. She lay down on her stomach and straightened her legs at full length.

“Is there anything I can do for you before I go?”

"No, thank you, Mommy, I'll be all right."

Eleanor went out, closing the door softly behind her. Before going up to Arthur's room she stopped in the telegraph office at the side of the hotel and sent off two wires to her friends Mrs. Gilmore and Mrs. Kent, just as she had told Arthur she would do. The wires were identical, and read: "Make ready to congratulate me. Have found my ideal and his daughter."



AT THE first tap on Arthur's door he was up in a flash, and before she had a chance to catch her next breath she was pulled in and he was smothering her with kisses. It was so difficult for them to be alone that she also responded ardently to his caresses, now that opportunity offered them a few brief moments. Running his hands along the beautiful curves of her sturdy body, he realised even more than before what a ravishing creature she was. Pressing kisses on her warm and responsive mouth put him in such a state of excited anticipation that he doubted he would survive the wedding day.

They thought they heard someone before the door, and like a pair of guilty lovers disentangled themselves and glanced anxiously toward the corridor. It was a false alarm, but this time, to be in a better state of readiness against the approach of Hester, he sat down and pulled Eleanor on his lap. She put her arm affectionately around his neck and fondled his ear lobe with her soft fingers.

"How was the treatment, doctor? Did the patient bear up well under the operation?" He kissed each finger of her other hand.

"Very satisfactory, sir, the patient is now recuperating."

"And did Mama whip her poor Betty very, very hard?" he said, relinquishing the medical figure of speech. His cheek was resting against her breast as he asked this question, and his arm was pressing her waist harder than before. There was neither teasing note nor flippancy in the tone of his voice despite his selection of words.

"Not very, but it was a sounder whipping than she got the other day. I am only sorry about one thing, that it worked out so late in the afternoon. She's not getting as good a chance to rest as she should have had, because I told her to be here at seven 'o clock."

"That's a shame. Why can't she have the rest you think she ought to have? We could easily excuse her from supper and give Hester a plausible explanation. You could send a light supper up to Betty in bed."

"Thanks a lot, dear, but she'll be all right, I hope. Maybe I'll run up to see her before she ventures down at seven. I would like to spare her a lot of foolish questions from Hester if I can."

"I am sorry, honey. Hester keeps interfering with your programmes."

"Not at all, dear. Don't let's make it complicated. Everything will come out all right. I know Betty, she'll pull herself together in no time. I can trust her not to embarrass us."

"By the way, I meant to ask you that earlier, how would you describe the difference in degree between the whipping you gave her for swinging on the rail and this one?"

"Oh, I guess it was almost twice the number of lashes, most of them applied harder than last time."

"Wasn't there any comment at all about the severity of this dose?"

"In the first place, she's had many whippings much harder than this; and in the second place, if you think that she offers any arguments, pleas or suggestions, then you have no idea still how far she has progressed in her education. That inconvenience was present only in the early stage of her training; she got over that long ago."

"Listen, dear, why not begin at the beginning and tell me again just what happened from the time you came into the room until you left."

Eleanor gladly complied because she knew that in another sense it was necessary to educate her beloved from the ground up. She took care to recall every detail and got as far as Betty's avowal of her guilt when they really heard someone at the door. She jumped up from his knees and had just managed to straighten her skirt when Hester walked in. She was already dressed for the evening. No sooner did she finish saying hello than she asked for Betty.

"She will meet us here at seven. What time is it, dear?" she asked Arthur.

Told it was ten minutes to seven she looked anxious and said she was going back to her room for a few minutes. Would they excuse her? she would join them presently.

"Didn't she finish scolding Betty? Maybe she thought of something she left out."

"Now, Hester, I don't like these sarcasms." His face flushed. "Would it be asking too much of you to try showing some respect for me and my future wife?"

"I'm sorry, dad." She said that more mechanically than sincerely, and for the first time the thought came to him that he'd like nothing better than to turn her clothes up and whip her bottom soundly with a leather strap until she learned to keep her tongue in her head. What a

difference between her and Betty! He swore furiously at himself. Then he brusquely remembered to pick up the thread of their conversation.

“If you are as sorry as you say, I would appreciate some proof of it. Please don’t renew your line of questioning about whether or not Betty was scolded, either with her or with Aunt Eleanor. Will you oblige me?”

“All right, dad, just as you say. Don’t get excited.”

He decided to change his necktie, and she dropped into a soft chair, crossed her legs and reached over for the newspaper lying at the foot of his bed.

Several minutes later in walked Betty and her mother, and Arthur looked right past her in order to take in as much as his eyes could see of Betty. She looked more beautiful than ever. Yes, he repeated it, he never saw her look more adorable. Cold water must be a miracle drug, he decided, for observe what it had accomplished. Where lived the wizard who could suspect those clear and sparkling eyes of swimming in tears but an hour ago, or that these fresh peaches the vulgar called cheeks could have been the watering ground for those tears. He was startled out of his absorption by the voice of Hester.

“Hey, what took you so long?” she was talking to Betty and her voice could be heard above that of Eleanor who was asking Arthur when do we eat.

“Who, me?” Betty pulled playfully on Hester’s pocketbook. “I was lying on the bed, resting.”

“Huh! I like the way you manage to get your forty winks in every once in a while.”

“Don’t I though?” she laughed back.

“I guess my good old Aunt Eleanor sees to that, hey?” Hester squeezed Eleanor’s arm affectionately. Arthur was beginning to breathe easier, it was patent she was trying to mollify her father after their testy exchange.

Eleanor, quick to respond to Hester’s mood, turned around.

“Arthur, darling, she’s trying to make bad blood between us, calling me old. Shall I spank her?”

“You couldn’t do her a greater favour,” shot back Arthur, “I’d be delighted!”

“My pal!” exclaimed Hester, poking Betty in the ribs and pointing a finger of her other hand at her father. “Do you think I deserve such loving consideration, Betty?”

“I wouldn’t want to see you get less than I do.”

“What do you mean by that?”

"I mean . . . I hope mother loves you as much as she does me."

Was there ever such a little diplomat! Eleanor looked at her proudly, then impulsively threw her arms around her shoulders and kissed her lovely child on her face and neck.

"When do we eat, folks?" asked Betty as soon as she was released.

Now Arthur came and put his arm around Betty.

"Eleanor, darling, I don't think I want to have her in our home. She'll eat me poor with her appetite." He tried his heaviest frown on her. Everybody laughed as they started for the door. He couldn't resist letting his hand slide down over Betty's hip, it was the first time he got so familiar. He didn't know whether it was his imagination influencing him or what, but he could have sworn a wave of heat came through her silk dress against the palm of his hand. Moreover, he could have sworn again that he detected a heavy gait in the way she moved her legs.

After supper a discussion arose over what to do. Hester was for taking a long walk down to the pier casino and dancing. Her father said that was all right with him, but Eleanor wasn't sure that she cared to go. Under the pretext of an open dress hook she called Betty over to a corner.

"Do you think you can walk to the pier, baby?" she spoke softly.

"If the others want to go, I guess I can manage." There was not a great deal of enthusiasm in her voice.

"You're such a darling!" her mother exclaimed. "Does your bottom still burn?" She placed a hand right over her seat.

"No, mother, it doesn't burn so much but it's still awfully sore."

They returned to the others.

"Can't we go somewhere close to the hotel and sit instead?" asked Eleanor.

Arthur kept discreetly quiet. He had a good idea of what passed while Eleanor hooked up Betty's dress.

"Oh, that's no fun," protested Hester.

"Let's go to the pier, mother. I think that will be nice," put in Betty, brave little trooper that she was.

"All right, we'll compromise," pronounced Eleanor. "We'll walk slowly to the pier, but I don't want Betty to dance."

"Why can't she dance, Aunt Eleanor?" asked Hester, thinking she was rushing in to Betty's aid, and resenting more and more this arbitrary decision.

Eleanor had to think fast.

"I don't want her to go down with a cold, at this time of the year

especially." Then, recognising the need for supplementing such an unexpected answer, she said, "She was sniffling already while lying in bed this afternoon."

Arthur found it a severe effort to maintain a poker expression in his face, even mother and daughter had to conceal their gratification at their agility in tight places.

As usual they paired off on the boardwalk, the two lovers together, the two girls now in front, now behind. Betty had to ask her companion a number of times not to rush, arguing it was such a beautiful night, why couldn't they just saunter along. Little did the unsuspecting Hester know how much more agreeable she would have found it if she could only have remained behind, trying to relax face down on her bed and nursing her poor tender bottom.

At the casino on the pier Arthur danced twice with his *fiancée* and twice with Hester. Betty alternately sharing company with her and her mother. The chairs around the hall were uncomfortable and Betty stood most of the time. Her mother naturally did not insist, but when she was with Hester she found it difficult to refuse. Every time she sat down she was unable to concentrate on Hester's small talk. She had to search for pretexts for standing up, the relief she would feel being comparable to a long halt between one whip lash and another; and she was glad when it came Hester's turn to dance again and she could be alone with her understanding mother.

When they decided to go home Eleanor asked Arthur to take them back in a taxi, not wishing to subject Betty to the discomfort of the long walk to the hotel. For this she got a very grateful glance from her daughter. The rear seat in the cab was comfortable for three and Eleanor so manoeuvred it that she sat in the middle with Arthur at the right corner, Betty at the left, and Hester in the less comfortable folding chair in front. During the ride back mother and daughter kept very close to each other, Eleanor having one arm possessively around Betty's neck, the other lying in Arthur's lap.

In the lobby they found comfortable chairs and sat around talking for some minutes. Eleanor dropped her pocketbook and Betty jumped up to get it. When she rose with it her mother seized her about the waist and held her alongside her lap while she listened to a story Arthur was concluding about a recent real estate transaction that seemed to be turning in his favour. Betty nestled against her mother like a kitten, comforted by the soothing hand that ran gently back and forth against the girl's hip. As soon as Arthur concluded, Eleanor turned to Betty.

"Darling, you look so tired. Don't you want to go up, stretch out, and

get a good night's rest?"

"Yes, mother, I do." There was much more than dutiful compliance in her voice, there was eagerness. It was easy to tell for those who knew what she had endured in the late afternoon, that she would have welcomed that suggestion and privilege if it had been made hours earlier. She kissed her mother goodnight, did the same to her Uncle Arthur, and asked Hester if she was going to stay down. Hester in a reluctant voice, said she might as well go up too, there was no fun for her sitting and listening to her father talk about real estate. She went along with Betty. Their parents had no concern about Betty being kept up by idle chatter, feeling sure that in her tired condition she wouldn't encourage that sort of thing at this hour.

Eleanor and Arthur were constrained to remain in the lobby after the two girls had gone. It was too difficult to go up to Arthur's room because it adjoined Hester's and they were afraid of being overheard. So they remained up for several hours discussing their future plans. There were so many things ahead that they both agreed, on parting for the night, that they couldn't settle them all in one evening. One thing they did decide and that was to go back to the city on Sunday, and begin selecting their home first thing Monday. They felt they could actually take possession before school opened up for the girls.



SATURDAY passed uneventfully, with Betty her lively and vivacious self fully restored at the breakfast table. Hester was the first to remark the return of the bright disposition, and seemed satisfied with the explanation that Betty had suffered from 'some internal pain' which now had practically passed. Sunday after dinner they left by train for the city. On the train the girls playfully teased each other about their future home, who was going to have the best bed, and who the best closet. The younger threatened to deny the older any help in her lessons unless she yielded first preference in the use of their bathroom. It was banter in their most comical spirit.

At the station they separated, everybody kissed everybody else as though they didn't expect to see each other again for years to come, and Arthur promised to phone Eleanor after breakfast and arrange a meeting place and hour. His expectation that they would meet downtown for lunch was due for a disappointment, because when Eleanor reached her home she found phone messages and notes under her door

from both Mrs. Gilmore and Mrs. Kent saying it was imperative that she call them immediately on arrival. Arthur and she had both forgotten to reckon on them when they made their tentative date.

After resting a while she phoned Mrs. Gilmore, told her all about it, then phoned Mrs. Kent and told her all about it. By the time she got through with her second call she was tired enough to fall into bed with her shoes on, and both her wrists were paralysed from holding the receiver. After holding out against their request that she meet with them for lunch, she finally capitulated out of weakness, and when Arthur phoned in the morning he got the bad news. She promised to be at his house with Betty for dinner, and he had to content himself with that.

He left elaborate instructions with his cook and all-round maid, a middle-aged white woman he had but recently hired, urging her to prepare a festive table for four, and on his way to town stopped at a florist where he ordered gladioli, red roses, and calla lilies. From there he went to an old friend in the wholesale jewellery business from whom he received enthusiastic coöperation in the selection of a diamond engagement ring and a gold wrist watch for Betty. It was understood that both were on approval because of lack of time, and that they could either be returned for exchange or for letter engraving at his convenience.

The dinner was a gala affair, the guests being simply overwhelmed with the service, the thoughtfulness, and the beautiful gifts from their host. Betty, whose confidence in her future stepfather was never really under suspicion, was this night bubbling over with affection. She saw how happy her mother was, and her frank and generous nature felt a deep bond with the man who had made her mother's anxious dream for a sympathetic companion and father a reality. When the evening grew late and they bade each other goodnight, she jumped on Arthur's neck, thanking him again and again for his gift. She did the same with Hester whom she kissed "once for mother, once for myself, once for mother's beautiful ring, once for this gorgeous watch, and once for just so."

When Eleanor could get a word in between Hester and Betty and Arthur she promised to phone in the morning right after breakfast. Stubbornly refusing his offer to let him take them home, on account of the late hour, she compromised by accepting his car which she promised to meet him in the next day. On the drive home they reviewed the details of this memorable evening, and Eleanor, whose sense of timing was uncanny, realised how favourable the moment was for bringing up a certain subject with Betty. And Betty herself, dutiful child that she was, was not terribly dismayed when she heard her

mother say, as they began preparing for bed, that she proposed to have Uncle Arthur meet them at their home tomorrow, to serve lunch for three, and in her presence tell him officially the following things: that yesterday afternoon, just as they were dressing for the engagement dinner, Betty carelessly ripped a beautiful pair of new silk stockings against a closet hook, and that she was whipped for it right on the spot; that in the last five days at the shore she was also whipped, twice, once pretty soundly; that she has received hundreds of whippings these last six or seven years, and that she would probably receive hundreds more during the next six or seven years. Eleanor bluntly reminded her daughter that this would not be news exactly for Uncle Arthur, for they had been talking about it since they met, and he was particularly cognisant of the last two whippings at the hotel.

She assumed it wasn't necessary to appeal to Betty's good sense in pointing out that Uncle Arthur had to be told at once, just as soon as they discovered they were in love with each other. After all, mother and daughter had been over this ground before, that morning in their room at the hotel. What she wanted to point out now was that they had reached the next stage, beginning with the engagement dinner, and that was the inauguration of a frank attitude, devoid of all pretence or whispering, between these three—the inclusion of Hester would have to wait on time and circumstance.

She had no trouble in exacting a promise from Betty that in the first open conversation, now scheduled for tomorrow, she would conduct herself in a manner to make her mother feel proud, to be able to show Uncle Arthur the fruits of her education thus far, and to leave no impression behind that she was struggling with a silly, stupid, inexplicable modesty in the presence of her future stepfather. Besides, it would be a good first practice lesson for Betty and she hoped the girl would take advantage of it. This last remark filled her with a sense of uneasiness, for she didn't know whether to interpret that as a promise of an introductory whipping for the benefit of her Uncle Arthur. Her good training, however, helped her resist asking for an explanation to that ambiguous statement, and when her mother kissed her goodnight and turned to go Betty kissed her in return and put out the light.

In the morning after breakfast, when Eleanor called Arthur, she had no trouble making him understand the advisability of parking Hester somewhere and coming to lunch at her house, alone, when she intimated that Hester wasn't ready as yet for the subject she wished to discuss. She prepared an appetising light lunch featuring a dessert of huckleberry cake she made, remembering his fondness for it at the



*She proceeded to give that enormous bottom of hers
as fine a frying as I've seen in weeks*

hotel. He came early and during the lunch talked enthusiastically about a routine of house-hunting he had mapped out for the next few afternoons. When the dessert came he was rhapsodic in his praise of her culinary accomplishments, insisting he was going to find her a job in a first class hotel as a high-priced chef and live off her salary.

After the coffee they went into the living room, Eleanor pointing out a chair for him and seating herself in another opposite. When Betty made as if to settle back on a wall couch Eleanor stopped her.

"Come here, darling, and sit on my lap. I want especially to talk to Uncle Arthur about you. Can't you guess what it is, dear?"

"Yes, mother," she said. Her face flushed, her eyes drooped, and her head started sliding down on her mother's breast as it generally did when the question and answer period arose after punishment.

"Hold your head up, dear. You're not ashamed of what I am going to talk about, are you?"

"No, mother." She lifted her head and tried to look toward Uncle Arthur, but she looked in his direction rather than at him

"Well, to begin with, Arthur dear, I want you to know that yesterday afternoon at about 5:30, while we were preparing to come to your house for dinner, Betty carelessly did a little damage and I whipped her for it right away. Didn't I, dear?"

"Yes, mother," she said, her blushes now extending to the back of her ears.

Arthur, who realised that the long anticipated moment had arrived, was sitting on the edge of his chair, peering intently at Betty and doing his utmost to conceal his own excited state of mind.

"It wasn't very much of a whipping, it's true, for the damage she did was slight. Still, we had to take time out for it, for Betty knows that all acts of carelessness are punished, even though lightly. You know, of course, that I whipped her twice in the last five days we were at the shore, the second time rather severely. In addition, she received three other whippings in the eight days we were at the hotel prior to meeting you. Perhaps you recall my telling you in some of our conversations, that I have been imposing these punishments on Betty since she was eight years old."

"Yes, of course, I recall them." Quite! He might forget his name but it wasn't likely he would ever forget those conversations, or this one. His own words startled him, for he was too absorbed in what Eleanor was saying.

"During that time, it would be safe to say," she continued, "Betty has been whipped hundreds of times, and it's because I intend to continue

punishing and training her until the day she's married, that I consider our present conversation appropriate at this time. In a few weeks you and I will marry, and then we shall all be together. You have promised that you will not interfere with my supervision over Betty's education, and if you don't mind, I should like you to confirm that promise in her presence."

"In the brief time I've known you and Betty I've come to love you both above everything in the world." Arthur found his voice quickly and was glad that the moment had come to tell Betty what he had been eager to say for days. "I've already told you, sweetheart, at least a hundred times, how much I love you, and I hope to keep on telling it to you the rest of my life. But now I want to talk to Betty, rather than to you. How sincerely and deeply I love you, Betty darling, you will find out in the days and years to come. You are my daughter every bit as much as Hester is, and you will never find me favouring her above you, not even in the littlest things. In fact, I believe I should be more disposed to favour you because of your superior advantages in training, for which you owe your dear mother so much

"As for your punishments, I shall never interfere. I have only to look at you to see what a presumptuous act it would be for me to tell your mother what and what not to do in your behalf. What is more, I shall train myself, difficult as I expect it to be, not to sympathise with you before, during or after your punishment. At all other times, however, you can rest assured, you will find me devoting myself to my greatest joy,—making you and your mother, and Hester too, as happy as a loving and hard working father and husband can. I couldn't wish, or strive to make for you, any happier future than help you grow into the radiantly exquisite woman your mother is."

"No wonder I fell for you," said Eleanor laughing and blushing. "When you talk like that your words become so many ropes that bind me to you inescapably. Let's kiss him, darling." They both jumped up and ran into his outstretched arms. Two minutes later they were back in their respective seats.

"Now, baby dear, I want you to tell Uncle Arthur in your own words how I whip you."

Betty took a deep breath and braced herself as for a severe whipping. She had expected the conversation would take this turn, yet had foolishly hoped she might be mistaken. This was, in a sense, worse than a whipping, but what could she do? When her mother called her baby it always had a hypnotic effect on her. Fifteen already, and as big as the average girl of eighteen, and lovely to look at, she should have felt

humiliated at being regarded as a baby, and to be called that even before strangers. Instead, the effect on her was a strangely opposite one, for it stirred a desire to nestle up close and put her head on her mother's breast, to close her eyes and be held tight and fondled. Obediently she began: "When mother is displeased with me, Uncle Arthur . . ." she paused.

"Yes dear, go right ahead, I am listening," he said softly, trying to control his voice.

"She sends me to my room where I have to make myself ready for punishment and wait for her. I take off everything except my knickers or girdle, then I get the instrument she wishes to use, as well as wrist and ankle belts, from the drawer, put them on the table next to the bed, and lie down. After mother enters I have to assume whatever position she demands, kiss the instrument, and hand it over. Then mother whips me."

"You forgot something, dear," cautioned her mother, gently.

"What, mother?" The child looked puzzled.

"What do I do with your knickers or girdle?"

"Oh, you pull them down and I have to help you with my legs to get them off."

"That's right. Go on."

"Then you whip me." She paused. "After that . . ."

"No, no, no!" Eleanor raised her voice. "Not so fast! Where do I whip you? On what part of your body?"

Betty swallowed hard.

"You whip me on my . . . on my bottom. Then . . ."

"Wait just a minute!" She pulled her back on her lap still closer to her breast. "You don't have to tell this to me, dear. Address yourself to Uncle Arthur, please. Now go back to where you were before these interruptions. Tell Uncle Arthur what I do with your panties."

"Mother pulls my panties or girdle off, Uncle Arthur, and I help her with my legs," she resumed, obediently, like a perfectly trained pony to the bridle of its master. "Then she whips me . . . on my . . . bare bottom"—the telling seemed easier after the obstacle of those words—"with the strap or martinet, or sometimes the back of my hairbrush or a ruler, until she thinks I've had enough. Then mother sits me on her lap and asks me questions about the thing I displeased her about."

"About the thing I displeased her about! Such English dear!" interrupted her mother, reprovingly.

"Excuse me, mother, I mean the thing you were displeased about, and whether I deserve to be punished for it." Remembering to address

Uncle Arthur, she continued. "At the end I have to say, 'Yes, mother, I deserved to be punished for that. Thank you for whipping me.' Then I kiss the strap again and kiss mother, and it's all over."

And was she glad the recital was over! She drew a long breath. But the dear child was anticipating. Her mother's voice reminded her that there was more to come.

"Tell Uncle Arthur, dear, about the belts."

"Very often mother makes me lie on the bed, and there are two narrow canvas belts, one for my wrists and the other for my ankles, which she fastens. Then she puts a pillow under my stomach, fixes my feet to the bedspring, then whips me. When she does it that way she stands over the bed instead of sitting down."

"Is that position used for the more severe whippings?" Finally Arthur trusted himself to ask a question.

"Yes, Uncle Arthur, generally."

"What is the proportion of those whippings to the others on mother's lap?"

"About half and half, I guess."

"Get down off my lap, dear," said Eleanor, "and show Uncle Arthur the instruments I use to whip you with so he will know what you are talking about."

Oh, darn it! thought Betty. When were they going to change the subject? Just the same she got off her mother's lap and went to the drawer from which she extracted the strap, martinet and ruler and brought them over to her Uncle Arthur. He took them in his hands and looked at them with fascinated eyes. One was an eighteen-inch wooden ruler without the brass edge, the other a whip having nine leather lashes, each about fifteen inches long, a quarter of an inch wide and one-eighth thick, all attached to a round wooden handle about nine inches long. The colour of the leather was yellow and the texture rather smooth. The black strap, which has already been described, Arthur examined more intently than the others. Its glossy surface stimulated his imagination. What stories this quiet and ostensibly useless piece of leather could tell if it could only talk! What terrific powers of persuasion lay in its stinging contact with the sensitive flesh of a young girl's posterior! No indeed, it could never lose in an argument—hadn't Betty's crying testimony confirmed that hundreds of times!

"Which hurts the most, dear?" He managed another question.

"I can't say, Uncle Arthur, it depends on how mother uses them. They can all sting and burn dreadfully."

"Well, does the pain carry over longer from any one of these?"

"I don't think so, Uncle Arthur, it all depends on how hard and in what position they are used."

"Mother was telling me that you have two girl friends who also get whipped. What are their names, dear?"

"You mean Janet Gilmore and Alice Kent?"

"I guess so. Are these the sort of instruments their mothers use on them, too?"

"On Janet, yes, Uncle Arthur, they're something like these. But on Alice, Josephine and their brother Anthony, their mother and father use all sorts of things."

Arthur thought his surprises would never terminate with this wonderful family. He turned to Eleanor.

"Look, sweetheart, you didn't tell me about all those Kents. Are there three in that family, and do both mother *and father* . . . ?"

"That's right, darling, I didn't get around to the Kents, did I?"

"Well, of all things! Then there are four others you know intimately. I wish you would tell me about them, Betty dear."

"I hate to interrupt this, children," said Eleanor, interrupting just the same, "but if we are going to do anything else with our house plans except carry them in our heads, we'd better get going. If I let Betty start on her friends it will take another hour. I'll remind her to tell you about them some other time, first chance we get. Come, honey child," she pulled her up against her breast as they were standing, and rained kisses on her face and neck, "put those instruments away and let's get started."

Betty knew—and Arthur grasped the significance of the gesture, also—that her mother was proud and pleased with the way her obedient jewel carried out her promise.



THEY drove out to Croton Woods in Arthur's car, looked at a few styles of newly-erected houses, and then drove back to talk with the representative of the building development. In a general sense the houses they looked at measured up to their expectations, but they felt they would be doing more justice to themselves if they continued hunting around for another few days. When they came out of the agent's office it was five o'clock, and Arthur remarked that he promised to phone Hester at home at about six. Betty spoke up with a characteristic question.

"How about ice cream, mother? Let's drive over to Blakelee's and get some of their butter pecan, huh, mother?"

All three were sitting up front in the car, Eleanor in the centre. She grabbed Betty's hand and playfully slapped it.

"There she goes again! What shall I do with her, dear?"

"I'll tell you what to do with her. Drive her over to Blakelee's and buy her some butter pecan. Maybe I'll have some too, you can watch us eat."

Betty called across. "There's a pal for you."

"Yes, dear, the voting is against me, it seems. I hate to turn you down, baby, you've been such a good girl all afternoon," she hugged her tight, "but don't you think it's too late? We will be having dinner soon and it will hurt your appetite."

"Not mine, mother, I promise. Maybe yours and Uncle Arthur's".

"All right, let's go. We'll all have butter pecan. Blakelee's, chauffeur!"

At the pastry shop and restaurant they selected a corner table in the garden dining room and dipped into their ice cream with relish. Arthur seized on the convenience of the occasion to revert to a topic of the highest interest, unfortunately cut short when they left Eleanor's house.

"Darling, will you let Betty tell me now about the Kents and Gilmore's? I'm very curious about them."

"Certainly. You heard Uncle Arthur's request, dear?"

"Yes, mother, what do you wish me to say?"

"Tell us about Janet's punishments first, then about the Kent children."

"Well, Uncle Arthur, Janet gets whipped by her mother and dad. Hilda, their Swedish maid, also gets whipped, but only by Mrs. Gilmore. Janet is their only child and she gets punished for everything; they are very strict with her."

"How old is she?" asked Arthur.

"She's about a year older than I am, but we're in the same class at school."

"How often does she get punished?"

"Nearly every day, Uncle Arthur, sometimes twice in one day. Her mother whips her mostly for the way she does her school work, or for anything, and when her dad comes home from the office she has to give him a report for the whole day. He's very strict with her, and if he doesn't like her answers she gets another whipping from him. His whippings, though, are shorter than her mother's, but they're also harder and faster. While her mother makes her lie on a couch and gives her a certain number, her dad takes her right over his knee, pulls her knickers or girdle down himself, and then let's her have it."

"What does he use?" asked Arthur, not knowing what question to ask first."

"He prefers his hand, and Janet says it's terrible, and after that he likes a leather sole they've always kept around the house. It makes a loud noise, and the neighbours know that Janet is being whipped again. Besides hurting a lot, she dislikes that instrument most of all. Her mother generally uses a strap and a martinet."

"Like those you have?"

"Something like them, Uncle Arthur."

"Now tell me about Hilda."

"Hilda is a big strong girl about twenty-four years old. She admitted to Mrs. Gilmore, after the first whipping she gave her, that she was punished like that most of her life. Mrs. Gilmore usually makes her kneel on the seat of an armchair and lean over the back. Then she pulls her skirt back over her head, peels off the heavy rubberised girdle she has to wear, and whips her with a heavy dog-whip. Hilda is not allowed to wear knickers, the only time she may put them on is when she's going out, and even then she must wear them over her girdle."

"Does Mrs. Gilmore use that dog-whip on Janet, too?"

"No, Uncle Arthur, she doesn't, although she threatens to use it when Janet gets older."

"What sort of temperaments have Janet and Hilda? Do they appear worried or anxious all the time?"

"Only when they know they're going to get punished. Otherwise, they don't worry about anything. I like Janet very much; we have a lot of fun together."

"Do Janet and Hilda quarrel, or do they get along well?"

"Oh no, there's no quarrelling in that house! They get along all

right."

"How long has Mrs. Gilmore had Hilda?"

"Only about a year, I think. Before that she had a Scotch girl whom she whipped also. She went back to Scotland because her mother married a business man and she wanted Nellie home again."

"Do you see much of Janet after school hours?"

"Up to last year I saw her very often. They used to live near us, and we used to be back and forth in each other's houses all the time. The same with the Kents. Then they moved out to Hillcrest, and the Kents also moved not far from them."

"Is that anywhere near Croton Woods where we visited today?"

"Yes, it's right alongside."

"Did you ever see Janet whipped while you were in her house?"

"Oh yes, Uncle Arthur, quite a number of times, and Hilda too."

"And did they ever see you get whipped?"

"Janet did, lots of times, but Hilda only once. That was the time mother and I were over in their house and I got fresh with her and told her to mind her business, that she was only a servant."

"That's right, dear," broke in Eleanor. "And I said right then and there that I would whip you in front of that servant, in order to teach you that young ladies must be well-mannered even when addressing social inferiors."

"Yes, mother."

"Now tell me about the Kents, dear," requested Arthur.

"Whew! that's a long story. Everybody gets whipped in that house. Everybody, that is, except their maid: she's a woman about as old as Mrs. Kent. They have all kinds of systems in that house, and the kids all have to toe the mark or they get it plenty."

"Tell me, first, how their ages range."

"Alice is sixteen, and Jo—that's Josephine—is twenty-one, and Tony, their brother, is past fourteen."

"Your friend is Alice, I think you said. You don't have much to do with the others, is that right?"

"I always see them, but Alice is my intimate friend. And of the three, she's the bravest about her punishments. She refuses to get excited, she says. Jo used to make scenes but she doesn't any more; still, she puts on a terribly long face about it every time. Tony tries to fight against being punished; of course, he always loses, but he doesn't give up trying anyway. It's his dad that usually whips him; Mrs. Kent says she's not going to wear herself out struggling with him, so she waits until his dad comes home. He yanks him down the cellar where he stretches him over a

barrel arrangement they fixed up. Up to this spring Mr. Kent had to do most of the work, tie him up, and so on, but lately Tony has been showing more sense, especially after it dawned on him how much harder he got whipped for struggling so much. Most of the credit for the change I think is due to Alice, who has been trying to persuade Tony for several years to be more submissive."

"All right, darling, if you don't mind, I think I'll tell Uncle Arthur about Jo, because her mother and I had a long talk yesterday."

"Oh sure, mother, you can do it more correctly anyway." She wasn't at all reluctant to turn the floor over to her mother. She leaned back in her chair and began tilting on its back legs, like the irrepressible youngster she was, evidently happy to be through with her stint, and at the same time started toying with her spoon.

"Stop that, Betty, and put that dirty spoon down," said Eleanor firmly. Betty responded like a spring touched off, the spoon went back to the saucer, the chair was on its four feet again, and Betty's hands were on the table, the fingers clasped.

"Now, things like this I overlook with Betty, or at least I give her one warning, but if Mrs. Kent were in charge of her, my Betty would be writing herself down for about thirty lashes from a strap." The subject of this observation looked straight ahead, a sober expression on her face and a little colour in her cheeks. "I'll explain what I mean," continued Eleanor. "Mrs. Kent makes Jo keep a diary on the dressing table in the bedroom which she shares with Alice. Nothing is written in that diary except Jo's bad conduct marks. Mrs. Kent is an extremely strict disciplinarian, and lets nothing go unpunished, no matter how trivial it may be.

"Take this incident of Betty's, for example. She will just say: 'Jo, you will put yourself down for thirty,' and go calmly on with what she was doing. If Jo makes a grimace, or tries to argue about it, she stands an excellent chance of having the dose doubled on the spot. The girl knows that when she next goes to her room she has to enter on the diary page of the day something like this: 'For tilting chair and toying with dirty spoon, 30.' Mrs. Kent allows Jo the privilege of paying off those charges whenever she wants to, provided they have not accumulated for longer than one week. Naturally, knowing how hard her mother whips, Jo cannot let them pile up too high, so every few days she goes to her mother and asks for a whipping to clean up her charges. After the whipping, she hands the diary to her mother who writes PAID in red ink across the pages that have been settled for."

"Since she is so well-trained, why does she get moody about her punishments?" asked Arthur.

"Either Betty didn't state it correctly or you misinterpreted what she said. Jo doesn't stop arguing with herself, and sometimes with her mother, about the fact that she is over twenty-one and too old to be whipped. It seems that, despite the warnings her mother gave her that she would whip her until she got married, Jo thought she was fooling, and that when she reached 'maturity,' as she called it, she would be let off. Every whipping seems to remind her that her freedom is still a long way from being realised, and that depresses her for a couple of hours; but she gets over it. Jo is really a very nice person, and I like her a great deal. She once asked me, although she has asked her mother the same thing a dozen times, why is she whipped so hard, even for less reasons than Alice gets punished for. I gave her the same answer she receives from her mother, that the older a girl gets, particularly if she is over twenty-one, the more strictly she ought to be made accountable after a lifetime of whipping. She doesn't seem convinced yet."

"Is Jo allowed any boy friends?" asked Arthur.

"That's where the rub comes in. She is allowed boy friends, her mother and father insisting on knowing them first, of course; and while they never reveal to these boys the discipline Jo is under, nevertheless her whippings frequently interfere with her dates. Since Jo is a popular girl, that's often extra hard punishment."

"Does her father ever whip her?"

"Sometimes. There's no feeling about that, even on Jo's part. He's been doing it, or watching her mother do it, over these many years, so her body is nothing strange to him. Besides they have handled that question very intelligently down there. They never permitted any hypocrisy about the physical body or the phenomenon of sex to distort the minds of their children, consequently, they have had an excellent development: the fact is, however, Mrs. Kent tells me, that so far this year he has whipped Jo only twice."

"But he whips Alice oftener?"

"Oh yes. I guess Alice's mother and father divide her punishments about equally between them. Wouldn't you say that too, dear?" she said, turning to Betty.

"Yes, mother, that's what Alice told us, don't you remember when she was over to help us pack?"

"And what about Alice's mood in these matters?" asked Arthur again.

"She's all right. The Kents have less trouble with her than with their other two. She's a pretty close second to my darling over there," she smiled affectionately. "I think she gets whipped more often than Betty

does, but she also takes them in her stride and doesn't let them spoil her gay nature. She's bigger than Betty, has a wider and fuller bottom, and greater endurance than her friends. Sometimes I think it's because her bottom is heavier and doesn't tire as much from jerking around as the others do."

"Does Alice have to keep a diary record also?"

"Yes, but she manages to run into many an occasion when her mother or dad tell her not to bother adding this to the charges recorded, then whip her on the spot. Alice wastes no time about it; she coöperates beautifully. She promptly takes the position she's told to take, fixes herself just right, and absorbs the last drop of pain she's supposed to get. I am very fond of Alice, and she is always welcome in my house. She is without a trace of false pride, disconcertingly frank sometimes, but a very honest child. Her mother and father deserve a great deal of credit."

"Well, I certainly have been hearing amazing things this afternoon. I keep wondering how Hester, who has never had a finger laid on her, will accommodate herself in these extraordinary surroundings."

"It occurs to me, now that you bring that question back," said Eleanor, "that if we took a house in some neighbourhood adjacent to the Gilmores and Kents—I mean, where all these kids could be pretty close to each other—that Hester would have a tough time dodging their discussions."

"They wouldn't tease her, would they? I don't think I would like that."

"No indeed! Just let them attempt it and they'll get their bottoms fried good and hot! The word 'tease' is a fighting word in our vocabulary. No, what I meant was that Hester would be put into a position where she would have to solve one problem all by herself. She would have to make her choice whether to share their company and participate in their activities and conversations, or to stay in her tent and sulk and sulk. I imagine that even if no one reproved her for it, she would presently get awfully fed up with the monotony of that attitude."

"Umh. It should prove an interesting experiment." Arthur's face assumed such a professorial look as he made the quiet observation, that neither Betty nor her mother could refrain from laughing. To the girl, however, who was as keen in perception as her elders, there was more to that remark than a mere joke. If until now she lacked official confirmation of what her stepfather's attitude was going to be toward Hester's initiation in their confraternity, she knew at least that he had no intention of taking an intemperate or inflexible stand against it. So

much the better, she thought, for it would facilitate matters all around. Though not entirely in her mother's confidence, she had no doubt what her plans were for Hester, and since that premise was correct, it was quite likely she adopted them with Uncle Arthur's knowledge and consent. This opened up a new field for thought, and she speculated on the direction her mother's strategy would take. She anticipated that there would be a few exciting scenes no matter what the programme might include, but knowing the powerful nature of her mother's personality, and her passion for the use of the rod as the most efficacious corrective, she had no doubt of the final outcome in the forthcoming struggle with Hester.

Suddenly Arthur reminded himself of his promise to the girl who was occupying so much of their minds, and that it must be way past six o'clock. He excused himself and walked over to the booths in the main dining room where he phoned and learned that dinner would be ready in a half hour. He told Hester where they were and that they would rush over right away.

The conversation during the meal was all about the houses they had seen and those they intended looking at the next day and the next, and after dinner they went for a ride in Arthur's car. Hester and Betty sat in the rear, giggling most of the time about nonsensical little things. The evening was sultry and when Hester proposed stopping somewhere for ice cream a good-natured argument arose. Eleanor settled it by compromise, Hester getting her ice cream, the others taking ices and lemonade. It was nearly midnight when Arthur deposited Betty and his *fiancéé* at their door. Eleanor rushed her daughter off to bed without giving her a chance to start a conversation downstairs, telling her, however, that she would be in to kiss her goodnight before she went to bed herself. Almost a half hour later, already in pyjamas, she stepped into Betty's room. Her daughter was lying in bed, reading a book.

"What's this, still up?" Eleanor said, pretending to be angry.

"You said you were coming in to kiss me goodnight," answered Betty, herself pretending a plaintive air.

"So I did," her mother reminded herself, sitting down on the edge of the bed. She put her arm around Betty's neck and kissed her affectionately on both cheeks. "You can be a wonderful child when you want to," she said. "I am very proud of the way you behaved before Uncle Arthur. You kept your promise like a good friend, and I love you very, very much."

Betty glowed with gratification. Nothing she liked better than to hear

words of praise from her mother. They didn't come very often, not that she didn't deserve praise at times, but that mother was very economical about putting it into words. Generally, her satisfaction expressed itself in a hug or kiss, and Betty always knew what that meant. But actually to hear words of praise was a considerable pleasure. It ought be a good time, too, to ask a question that was on her mind.

"Mommy, darling, how are you going to make Hester obey you? Could I help in any way?"

"You are a naughty child to ask such a question," she said, reaching over and giving Betty two gentle taps on her upraised hip. "Anyway, I don't know how I'll begin, yet. Maybe I'll talk to you about it sometime, maybe I won't. Go to bed baby mine, and have a good night's rest. We have lots to do tomorrow." She kissed her eyes.

Betty laid the book on the reading table adjoining her bed and put out the light.



TWO DAYS later Arthur signed a lease for a house on Torrington Road, at the edge of Croton Woods. It was a two-story and basement completely detached house, having three bedrooms and two baths on the second floor, and a maid's room and bath off the kitchen on the first floor. The room allotted to the girls was the largest in the house, after the living-room. It had four windows, two large closets, and a glass-enclosed shower in the bathroom, which had no tub. Their parents were to take the room with the tub. The place, it developed, was situated about a half mile from the Kents, and only about a quarter mile from the Gilmores. It had the special advantage for Betty in that it brought her nearer to the high school she and her two friends attended than she was last year. It was decided to let Hester finish out at her old school as the year beginning with the Fall term was her last in high school.

With the question of their new home disposed of, they settled the next one of a marriage date. They were both eager to advance it to the nearest practical time. It was the 12th of August when they signed the lease, and they wanted to move into their new home on the first of September. This would give them reasonable time to get straightened out before the school term began. They figured out a logical schedule, appointing the 22nd of August as their wedding day. The plan called for a quiet affair with only their children present, and an old classmate

of Arthur's who was also one of his best friends. The 22nd fell on a Thursday and they planned a short honeymoon till Monday, to be spent at no other place than the very hotel at the shore to which they gratefully owed the debt of their felicitous meeting. The only problem that obtruded in these plans was the question of the children. How could they dispose of them? Eleanor thought there was one possible solution and that was to ask Mrs. Gilmore to take them in for those four or five days. This brought back the everlasting question of how to break the sad news to Hester that all these girls acknowledged a higher authority than their own moods or impulses; and that physical pain in the form of good old fashioned whippings, hallowed by immemorial practice, with assorted instruments vigorously applied to their bared bottoms no less, was almost their daily lot. Eleanor's dependable brain failed her at this moment, and Arthur, of course, rightly pleaded his ignorance as the cause for his inability to advance a suggestion. She finally decided to put the question over until tomorrow, saying she would phone Mrs. Gilmore in the morning, arrange to see her early, state their problem, and ask her if she had any suggestions. So it remained.

At about ten the next morning Eleanor phoned Arthur at his office that she couldn't meet him until the late afternoon, that she was going over to Mrs. Gilmore's house with Betty, would stay there for lunch, and would phone him again when she was ready to leave. They had furniture to buy and some to sell, because certain duplicate articles they separately owned had to be disposed of before they could move in.

At the Gilmore's, Janet and Betty, who hadn't seen each other in weeks, fell on each other's necks as though it were a reunion after fifty years of cruel separation. Their parents good-naturedly had to pull them apart at last, and ask them to go out on the lawn and cool off—and not to come back, either, until they were called. With the children out of hearing, Eleanor began.

"Louise, darling, you'll have to come across with the best advice you have in stock."

"Advice all sold, but we have a good line of complaints we'd be glad to show you madam."

"Oh, I know, Louise, we've been beastly, but please forgive us; after all we have been back only a few days, and busy with I don't know what to tell you first."

"All right, but do we have you and Arthur for dinner or don't we?"

"First chance we get, dear, please believe me. Anyway, don't push me off my track. I told you this morning about the house we took, and

about the date we set for our marriage. Well, we can only take a Thursday to Monday honeymoon, Arthur can't stay away from the office longer, and I have so much ahead, what with furniture and moving, that we'll have to content ourselves with those few days. What I want to know is, where can I ship Hester and Betty?"

"That's a silly question. Send them over here, of course. We'll have a bedroom all ready for them. You know how welcome Betty always is in our house; when she and my kid get together you can't pry them apart. I don't know about Hester because, thanks to your indifference, I've never met her."

"Now don't be a cat, Louise. Everything in good time, my unreasonable friend. But that's just it. What about Hester?"

"Mean to tell me you've let another day go by without handing her the shock of her dear young life? Never thought you were the kind to shy away from the inevitable."

"Hey, listen, stop teasing. It's a rather ticklish state of affairs and believe it or not, I'm head over heels in love with Arthur. Consequently, I don't want to cause him unnecessary uneasiness. Might just as well do what I have to do with tact, or perhaps that's not your way, Louise, pet?"

"Well, let's get down to brass tacks," answered Mrs. Gilmore, crossing one leg over the other and clasping her hands over her knee. "How can I help?"

"That's what I've been sitting here all this time, waiting for you to ask. You can help me with some suggestions. I send Hester over here for four or five days, and if I know my Louise Gilmore at all, Janet or Hilda or both are bound to get their bottoms vigorously exercised,—where am I? . . . Oh yes, what would you do with Hester? Put sealing tape over her eyes and cement over her ears?"

"Passing the buck, eh?" observed her friend, trying to look tough but looking comical instead.

"We'll let that go. Oh dear, must I tell my story all over again? It's been terribly hard to lay out any programme that made sense, prior to our marriage. Arthur and Hester are in one place, Betty and I in another. It's true, we've been together afternoon and evening, but it's not the same thing at all. What we have really depended on, in the absence of any better plan, was on good old Father Time. We thought that getting under one roof, Hester sleeping in the same room with Betty, Hester seeing your Janet and Alice and Jo, hearing the talk, that pretty soon her mind would begin accommodating itself to the inevitable. At any rate, we felt we could afford the luxury of waiting. I

realise, of course, that in sending her over to you, I would be laying one of the most ticklish aspects of the problem right at your feet. That I don't want to do. It's not only not fair, but it would be harmful to my own prestige, which I must preserve at all costs. My question returns to how can we have a few days honeymoon by ourselves. Betty is no problem at all, Hester is the whole problem."

"It's not easy, Eleanor, I'll grant that. But while you were talking a thought ran through my mind. I don't know how good it is, but let's discuss it. Let us say, for example, that an occasion will arise—and between now and the 22nd it is more than likely, if I know my Eleanor MacAllister—" she said, bowing low, "where Betty needs to be punished. Suppose you contrived somehow that Hester should 'accidentally' hear Betty being whipped; or if that isn't easy, at least manufacture some reason for Hester going in to see Betty while she is resting or cooling off from the exercises she's just been submitted to. But then that would put the brunt of Hester's tirade right on Betty, and that doesn't seem wise, I must admit. What do you think?"

"That's definitely out, Louise. I certainly am not going to let Betty handle such a big task, and it would be silly, moreover, to depend on her to carry it out with any measure of success. But what I particularly don't like about your proposition is the subterfuge. I hate it. I have never employed it for Betty, and it would be a severe wound to my dignity if Betty ever found out that I employ subterfuges to accomplish my ends."

"My dear friend, you were never more wrong in your life. In the case of Hester, the end certainly justifies reasonable means, and don't tell me I'm wrong. Anyway, let me hold on to my subterfuge for a moment. You could arrange it so that you are in Betty's room when Hester comes in—after the whipping, of course. Then you could have the battle and the honours all to yourself, with Betty around giving moral support while she gathers up the clumps of your hair. The point I wish to make is, that once the horrible news leaks out to Hester she should be easier handling when she comes to observe the realities of the Gilmore discipline. Who knows, you may come back from your honeymoon and find Hester a humbly resigned neophyte. Seriously though, from the five of us in our house, including Betty, we might get a sufficiently good amount of sales talk across to show promising results."

"Now don't let your imagination run away with you, Louise. Coming back, however, to your idea, how is that first episode to be . . . eh . . . contrived—thank you so much for the word, my charming friend—

when we are still in two separate establishments?"

"Couldn't you find a reason for having Hester spend an entire afternoon, or day, in your house, with or without her father?"

"I don't know. I suppose I could talk that over with Arthur."

"Exactly the thing to do. Tell him that in view of the urgency of time, you have no recourse except to employ subterfuge. Point out that the logical place to send the girls if you are to have an unhampered honeymoon, is to my house. That in view of the rigid discipline for which Louise Gilmore is justly famous, it is most unlikely that five whole days would go by without either her daughter or her maid being punished; and that if tender-hearted Hester is to be fortified against permanent shock, something had better happen in a big way before the 22nd."

"And ask his assistance in the conspiracy?"

"Not to stand by! Oh no, not yet!"

"Don't be a fool, Louise. I didn't mean that. I meant, to assist me in working out the subterfuge."

"Of course, dear. How else?"

"Got any ideas?"

"Next thing you'll want me to do is to come down and handle the job myself."

"No thanks, you'd only spoil it."

"For that I am going to have Hilda put poison in your coffee for lunch. Now let me see, ideas . . . ideas . . . For one thing, I believe you had better find a really good reason for whipping Betty. It would be a big help in the ensuing argument. But I'm sorry, Eleanor. I can't think of anything like that without including Betty herself in your conspiracy. Is that asking too much?"

"I think it is. I wouldn't like that. It occurred to me once before, frankly, but I dismissed it at once."

"I don't think you'll be able to dismiss it. The more one stays with this problem, the more important becomes Betty's aid. Look here, she's a very bright youngster, she knows what you are planning, and co-operation—not interference—would be her natural reaction. The kid gets whipped so many times a year, she shouldn't resent one more, administered for no fault of her own but to aid her mother whom she dearly loves. Here's what I would do. I would have a frank talk with her, explain the entire problem, concealing nothing; ask, not demand, her consent to your plan, and actually reward her this time for the pain you have caused. Buy her a nice present."

"She doesn't need anything," answered Eleanor, pouting. "I don't like this part of it. Isn't there some other way?"

"Yes, sure. Just wait until Betty commits a very serious offence, say, lying or stealing, or endangering her own or someone else's life."

"You're horrid, Louise!"

Someone was tapping gently on the closed door.

"Yes, Hilda—I recognise her knock." The door opened and there was the general maid of the Gilmore family. She was a tall, fair-skinned blonde, like most of her Scandinavian sisters. A pure peasant type with high and wide cheek bones and wide forehead, she looked the picture of strength and health. Aided by her big feet and prominent hands, she would have made for an artist the perfect model in the *rôle* of plough horse—the type of peasant slave that Aristotle referred to when he called them "articulate agricultural implements" She was wearing a dotted gingham kitchen dress with a big wide apron wound around her enormous haunches. She had no stockings on, and her feet were covered by loose house slippers with low heels.

"If you please, madam, lunch will be ready in ten minutes. Shall I call the girls to wash up?" She spoke with surprisingly little accent.

"Yes, Hilda, all right. Did you want to wash, Eleanor?"

Fifteen minutes later Janet and Betty, both spick and span, and their mothers were at the table. It wasn't the same Hilda at all that served them. She was wearing a light blue linen uniform, white maid's cap on top of her blonde head, black silk stockings and black pumps with rubber cuban heels. She looked no less spick and span than any one else. Eleanor, who knew her very well, greeted her when she came in carrying a large platter of cold meats, tastefully arranged.

"How are you, Hilda? Haven't seen you in about a month. Been a good girl?"

"I try, Mrs. MacAllister. Sometimes I'm good, sometimes not."

"When was the last time your mistress punished you, Hilda?"

"Yesterday, Mrs. MacAllister."

"I am not surprised. Would have been if you hadn't. How do you manage to get into trouble nearly every day?"

"I don't know, Mrs. MacAllister."

"But you don't look any the worse for your whippings, hey?"

"No, Mrs. MacAllister."

"Come over here to me!" This was a sharp command from her mistress. Louise reached over to the big platter as she spoke and took off the long and heavy wooden service spoon. "Come around here to my left," were her next words. She put her left arm around Hilda's back waist, swung the wooden spoon out at arm's length with her right and let it fall on the maid's croup.

"Stop saying monotonously, 'Yes, Mrs. MacAllister, No, Mrs. MacAllister.' Don't you remember my telling you, you dummy, that ladies are Madam to you?"

Every other word was punctuated with a crack from the wooden spoon. It couldn't have hurt much, being applied over the skirt and under unfavourable conditions, and it should have been more humiliating by far than painful. But Hilda was pretty stolid about it; after all, she had been rebuked in some such manner many times in the presence of others.

"Thank you, madam, I won't do it any more." Not a tear, not a sigh. The moment she was released she went right back in the kitchen, returning immediately with one platter of potato salad and another of tomatoes and lettuce. As for the girls, all that was heard from them were a couple of nervous giggles after the cracks from the wooden ladle had been ladled out on Hilda's rump, but there was no sign whatever of any mental disturbance. The table conversation picked up wherever it was at the beginning of the interruption with no more concern for what had happened than if Mrs. Gilmore had swatted a fly. Eleanor now turned toward Janet.

"I scarcely had a chance to say hello to you, you fell on my poor child like a ton of bricks. How have you been, dear?"

"Oh fine, Aunt Eleanor." The three families had long ago established the custom of having the children address their elders that way. Considering all the years of intimacy, it would have been silly to keep up the formality among the children of 'Mr.' and 'Mrs'.

"I suppose you have been maintaining your usual average with mother and dad?"

"I'm afraid so, Aunt Eleanor." She glanced meaningfully toward her friend, Betty, as if to say: I've been expecting this any minute.

"She shouldn't complain, she's had it pretty easy this summer without any school work complications. I don't believe she's been whipped three times in the past week, were you, Janet?"

"Yes, mother, it's just three times since last Wednesday."

"How do you figure that out?"

"Twice by you and once by dad, night before last." She slid down in her seat and extended her foot in an effort to touch Betty's, for some private signal of their own, no doubt.

"Sit up!" came a sharp command from her mother. "Sit up straight, or you'll succeed in getting yourself a fourth whipping this afternoon, just before the week is over."

Janet straightened up before her mother's sentence was finished.



. . . for it was obvious that in such a position her bottom could catch most favourably the widest swing of her mother's right arm

Hilda brought in coffee for two and two glasses of milk for the girls. She was on her way back to the kitchen when her mistress called her sharply.

"Come back here! Turn around!" The words seemed harsh or unfriendly, but everybody, Hilda included, knew they weren't. It was merely the manner she used in addressing the girl. Hilda had many proofs of her mistress's good heart which she endeavoured to conceal behind this rough exterior. The girl came and stood alongside of Mrs. Gilmore's chair, her back turned as directed. The next thing she knew her skirt had been lifted up and her mistress's hand was down the top of her stocking past the roll above the knee. In another instant the hand was out and the skirt back in place.

"I thought I saw a hole in that stocking when you stooped down before. You would have had your bottom warmed right here, good and hot, if that were so. Get out! Back to the kitchen where you belong!"

As they rose from the table, Janet came over.

"Mother, may I go over to Betty's tomorrow afternoon?"

"Are you inviting yourself, or were you invited?"

"Betty asked me, mother."

"I said I would ask my mother," Betty hastened to correct her.

"I meant that," said Janet.

"I don't know. I don't think so. Go back on the porch, you two. Aunt Eleanor and I have some things to discuss, and she's very busy these days, as you know. I can't have you interfering with her plans."

Mothers and daughters went their separate ways. Back in the living-room, Louise turned to her friend.

"Well, what are you going to do about Betty?"

"Oh Lord! What sort of excuse would I use?" She was beginning to weaken.

"How do you mean that?"

"What will be the so-called reason for whipping her? You say it has to be for something supposedly serious. A serious offence calls for a severe whipping, and I don't want to do that. I want to make it very light instead of very heavy, if I have to do it at all."

"Well, if Hester is not going to be around when it happens, or is not going to overhear it, you can make it as light as you like. After all it's not necessary that she see the state of Betty's bottom after she's been whipped. You just want to get her in the bedroom afterwards, if that's the case."

"Maybe I'll do it that way," said Eleanor softly.

"Say, here's an improvement on that," continued Louise, her eyes lighting up. "Keep your Arthur out of this picture altogether. Set the scene so that Hester should be left alone downstairs, preferably at some task, so she is not tempted to go out while you and Betty are upstairs. Use some instruments—I'll be glad to lend you Fred's leather sole, his special instrument for Janet—that will be sure to make itself heard in unmistakable terms. I'll bet a dollar to a bent safety pin that if in the normal quiet of your house, Hester suddenly hears the rhythmic song of the strap she'll not only not run out in horror, but she'll stand by, transfixed."

"And if we know our girls at all, her curiosity will compel her to steal upstairs and investigate, even though she hasn't been asked to come up," added Eleanor.

"Particularly if she heard sounds that led her to believe you had gone out of the room."

"Okay. I suppose I'll work it all out somehow. Well, you've been a big help, Louise, even if it does take you all day to get an idea. You know it's almost three o'clock?"

"I like your nerve, Eleanor MacAllister! I'll bet your poor mother must have torn her arm out of its socket whipping you—there's another idea!"

"Yes, but look what a beautiful woman she turned out."

"If that means a fresh and ungrateful hussy, I'll concede it."

"Concede me the use of your phone, instead. I must call Arthur. Where is it?"

"Can't have it, it's disconnected."

They both rose, Eleanor going toward the telephone table, Louise toward the kitchen. Arthur was ready to meet them at once, Eleanor told her host, and so they would have to leave. She pulled Betty away from Janet and told her to put her hat on. The girls reminded their mothers of their previous request, and Louise looked at Eleanor while the latter looked back in return.

"Well have to wait and see what our programme is tomorrow, Janet dear," said Betty's mother, "and if I can let you come I will. I shall be talking to your mother on the phone in the morning anyway." Eleanor and Louise exchanged affectionate kisses, each telling the other how happy she was with the visit, both of them really loving the badinage they indulged in.

"You'll let me know about those arrangements?"

"Oh certainly, Louise. I still have almost a week's time, don't forget." She put her arm on Betty's shoulder, and together they stepped off the

porch. Toward the kitchen side stood Hilda, plate and towel in hand.

"Goodbye, Hilda. Be a good girl."

"Goodbye, Mrs.... Madam!" the maid answered, catching herself in time. The last view the visitors caught from the lawn was Janet waving goodbye and her mother frowning at the maid.



BY THE time Monday, the 19th, rolled around, they had put the major problems of housekeeping out of the way. Busy as they were buying and selling furniture and arranging many other affairs, they found ample time nevertheless to discuss privately the problem of Hester and the suggestions Mrs. Gilmore had advanced. Arthur supported Louise on the question of the employment of subterfuges for the specific purpose of breaking down his daughter's expected resistance to their disciplinary ideas. He gave Eleanor *carte blanche* to work out any device that would be of use in achieving this end. So far so good. But she couldn't rid herself of a sense of guilt; a consciousness of being mean in asking Betty to offer herself up as a victim in her designs. She knew Betty's nobility of character, that the child would yield with eagerness out of sheer love for her mother, and it was precisely because she returned that unselfish love that she hated to do this thing. Still, no matter how she weighed her problem, there was always the reality of the special circumstances which had to exist coincidentally, and which no group of fortuitous events could possibly insure. At this point, too, there were only three days left before the girls could be packed off to Mrs. Gilmore. While it was true that no harm had been caused by waiting since each day brought Hester and Betty closer in companionship, still only seventy-two hours actually remained in which to carry out her difficult little comedy. She had no choice now, she would have to talk to Betty. She asked Arthur to drive them home earlier this night as she intended to have a very frank talk with her daughter before bedtime. She promised to phone Arthur immediately after breakfast.

She sent Betty upstairs at once, telling her to undress and go to bed, but not to sleep, as she was coming up presently for a long talk. Twenty minutes later she went in, pulled the chair near the bed, and sat down. The procedure was so reminiscent that Betty was startled. What had she done now, she asked herself?

"Get up, darling, and come sit here on mother's lap."

She had been lying on top of the bed coverlet, wearing the yellow satin pyjamas her mother had given her for a present before they left for their seaside vacation. It took less than half a minute to comply with her mother's request, and they were in their favourite positions, for Betty loved to be held like this and Eleanor enjoyed mothering her only child.

"I've come to ask a great favour of you, sweetheart."

"Mommy!" exclaimed the girl, pulling Eleanor's face around and staring excitedly at her eyes. "What do you mean?"

"Ssh, baby, don't interrupt, please. I know that sounds very strange because mother rarely asks if you will do anything, she always tells you and expects it to be done. But this is different. It concerns my problem, our problem, with Hester. You have heard of course that we plan to leave Hester and you with the Gilmores next Thursday after we are married, and until we return from the shore on Monday, or Tuesday at the latest. Unfortunately, Uncle Arthur can't stay away longer from his office. I imagine you understood also that our visit to Aunt Louise yesterday was in connection with the same problem. In short, my darling, the time has come when we must face the issue of acquainting innocent Miss Hester with the disciplinary methods employed by me and Aunt Louise and Aunt Caroline. Haven't you been wondering about this problem, dear?"

"Yes, mother, I certainly have, but I've been afraid to bring the subject up without your consent."

"Well, I have ransacked my brain for a suitable plan because we anticipate, naturally, a violent reaction, and I needn't tell you how I detest scenes. Still, what else can we expect? The girl is nearly eighteen, has been woefully neglected, never knew what the word discipline meant, has had her own way all the time, and the results we see for ourselves. She is spoiled, has an unruly temper that lies right on the surface, is underweight, has an unhealthy skin very likely due to faulty digestion and improper elimination, and is generally a problem deposited right on my doorstep. Only an intensive program, courageously carried out, can hope to break through the settled habits of eighteen years of parental neglect. I need hardly tell you therefore that she has made the subject of many conversations between Uncle Arthur and me. From the start he has assured me a free hand. He not only authorises me to take full charge of the girl, but urges me to use my own discretion. He has repeatedly said that he could no more think of interfering between me and Hester than between me and you, for whom, my darling, by the way, he has an enormous affection. The

question now before the house is, how are we going to break the news to Hester?"

"You mean you want to begin punishing her right away, Mommy?"

"No, no! That's precisely what I don't want to do. She's not ready for it, yet. Our first task must be that of letting her know about you, and our immediate second, about Janet and Hilda, since in three short days I expect to plant both of you at their house." Having reached the most difficult part of her talk, she paused, searching for the next words.

"Now have you any idea by this time, darling, why I am talking to you about this? I don't usually bring my problems to you. Why am I bringing this one up?"

"Maybe I can help in some way. I asked you if I could before, remember mommy?"

"Yes, you did, dear. Well I think the time has come when I need your help. That's what I discussed at length yesterday with Aunt Louise. We felt that the wisest way to handle Hester was to bring the news to her by easy stages—by actual events, by overheard conversations, by conversations in which she participates, by argument and perhaps, even, by persuasion through example. No arguments of the kind from me, of course, for that would be highly improper. I couldn't, without grave injury to my dignity, allow myself to be placed in a position where I was trying to persuade her.

"The toughest part of our problem at the moment presents itself in the urgent necessity for an introduction of some sort before you move into the Gilmores for the long weekend. It's a foregone conclusion that Aunt Louise with her strict discipline will doubtless have the task of whipping either Janet or Hilda, or both, before you return home. Obviously, we don't want—and Aunt Louise was very correct in pointing that out to me—to throw Hester on such a scene, totally unprepared. It would startle the child out of her wits; and if there's going to be any scene at all, I don't want to shirk my responsibility by shoving it on to a comparative stranger. In other words, sweetheart, I want Hester to be at least partially prepared for the scenes she's pretty nearly bound to witness at Aunt Louise's. Have you any suggestions?"

"I was thinking maybe I could tell her about myself. I will if you want me to, Mommy."

"No, I've thought of that. But if it were to take that form, it should properly come from me and not from you. There is a greater objection still. She would have the right to ask herself why were we so cowardly in waiting until the last minute; why wasn't she told the first day I sent you upstairs for a whipping, the time, I mean, when you swung on the

hotel porch rail against my wishes. No, the news must come to her quite by accident now. And how could that be expected? Only by waiting until the next occasion arises when I have to whip you, and then doing it only at the time when she can be within earshot. That could be worked out if we could afford to wait, but unfortunately we can't. Now maybe you can understand why I have delayed talking to you about this for so long a time. For the first time in my life, I, your mother and stern teacher, find myself in an embarrassing position before you."

"What do you mean by that, mother?"

"The implication should be clear. It means I am either praying for an occasion to arise before tomorrow when you will do something very displeasing to me, or that I seek to manufacture the occasion—actually that I am looking about for a pretext for whipping you? That's very embarrassing to me, sweetheart."

"I am afraid I don't understand, mother. What must I do?"

"I am not sure yet what you must do, darling, but I do know that it's desperately important for all of us that I contrive to whip you either tomorrow or the next day, at the latest."

"Oh, I see," the elected victim drew a long breath, and her head leaned down into her mother's breast, as it always did when a whipping was the foremost thing on her mind.

"I hope you do, baby, and that you understand how necessary it be that Hester should hear you getting it."

"And then what, mother?"

"And then we must be prepared for the consequences. Oh, don't you see, dear, that unfortunately all of this business has to be brutally planned in advance? That's what I've been trying to work out these many days. My tentative plan relies on Hester's curiosity to learn for said, and to arrange matters in such a way that she can proceed to satisfy her curiosity on the assumption that I won't know about it."

"And what would I have to do then?"

"As I visualise that scene, she would only have to see you lying face down on the bed, sobbing quietly, and your bottom dyed a deep red colour, the leather strap lying right alongside your body, to have the whole story in one eyeful. I would expect you to invite her to come right in and ask her to sit down on the bed. This would squelch her possible impulse to rush out dramatically into that wide open street. Her affection for you would compel her to come close, to console and mother you, and ascertain what it was all about. Again, as I visualise it, her curiosity would make her take the initiative by asking all the questions; this should make it easier for you, for you could tell your story

that way more simply and more effectively than if you tried to make a long impromptu speech.

"I should like to arrange the setting still further where I could be listening to your conversation without her knowledge. That's another disagreeable phase of it, but very necessary as the guide to my next step in this educational programme. It would be impossible, of course, to calculate in advance the turn your conversation would take, and I am decidedly opposed to placing the heavy burden of dispelling a possibly tumultuous eruption on your young shoulders. Accordingly, I would like to have an excuse prepared for coming back into your room, if her reaction should take a violent or abusive turn. Obviously, only I, in that case, could attempt taking the situation in hand.

"I believe it would also be wise to have some prearranged signal between us by which, if you felt you were beginning to lose confidence to carry on alone with her for any reason, you could sign to me to come in. How all this is to be done is still beyond me, and remains to be worked out if I can count on your coöperation."

"You haven't any doubt about that, have you, Mommy? After all you've done for me, I ought to try and do something for you if I can. Just tell me what."

Eleanor squeezed her child impulsively with the arm that was around her waist, while with her other hand she began rumpling Betty's hair. Then lifting her face, she rained kisses on her eyes and neck. Neither spoke another word. When after a lapse of time, Eleanor did speak, it was to avoid the direct response she didn't trust herself to make.

"First of all, my precious baby, mother wants to be absolutely sure if you will forgive her for deliberately inflicting undeserved pain on your beautiful body."

"Oh Mommy, darling, don't talk like that!" This time it was Betty who was kissing her mother's face and hands all over.

"And do you forgive your mother for trumping up a disgusting subterfuge to provide a plausible excuse for whipping you?"

"You don't need to be forgiven, mother dear, you know that! You are only doing what is best, just as you always do."

"Thanks, baby. Mother will make all this up to you in some way, you may be sure of that. Getting back to this darn business, then, there are the significant details to be figured out. Two of the most important ones are, what shall be the so-called reason, and how, where, and under what conditions will Hester get an earful. Aunt Louise was careful to remind me that the so-called reason must have a serious basis. Hester mustn't learn at the beginning that you are whipped for small

offences as well as for big ones. The reason for the one we are planning must be a very sound one, that even Hester couldn't deny deserves some kind of punishment. Here's a kind of skeleton idea, you must tell me what you think of it.

"I must also find some way of inducing Hester to spend all day tomorrow with us here. I was thinking I could ask her to help us pack some stuff for our new home. Oh, by gosh, that suggests something! Glassware! Bric-a-brac! I could come by and tell you in very distinct terms to exercise the greatest caution in handling and wrapping those things. We might select something in the morning to sacrifice, perhaps that blue porcelain Buddha that stands above the mantelpiece. It was pretty costly, as I recall it, about ten or twelve dollars, but then it would have to be something expensive. At a specified time you could start juggling it carelessly around until you break it. Hearing the thing crash in the next room, I could come in, survey the pieces, look at you and send you upstairs. Right here I must find a task for Hester to keep her occupied on the spot for some time.

"But here come some other problems. What excuse can I find for pretending to leave the house right after I have whipped you, where can I conceal myself so I can hear your conversation, and what excuse would I have for returning, if I had to return suddenly? As to the first, I could of course come right downstairs after I've finished, announce in the calmest tone to Hester that I was going to such-and-such a place to perform such-and-such an errand and would be back at such-and-such a time. That's all very well, but how could I get back in the house again, and upstairs?"

"Easy as pie, mother. Calculate the time accurately and have someone phone a minute or so after you leave. You could even drop a word that if the phone rings to please answer it. See that she's kept on the phone long enough to allow you to steal back softly upstairs."

"You're a jewel! God bless you, darling! Go on, let me hear some more."

"You could get into your room, close the door gently, and then pull up a chair to the door between our rooms. Instead of continuing to lie in bed, I could get up, put my pyjamas on, and sit down—if I could—near our connecting door. This would compel Hester to take a seat near me, and it ought to enable you to hear what we say to each other. If I get nervous and feel I need you at once, I could manage to scrape something against our door, and that would be the signal for you to return suddenly from your errand."

"Oh, this is wonderful, darling! It's all getting into shape now. As I

see it, the most ticklish point is the timing of the phone call accurately. I'll arrange that with Aunt Louise. She'll be able to hold Hester on the phone long enough, for she can say: 'Are you Hester that I've been hearing so much about?' and so on and so on. Incidentally, I shall borrow Uncle Fred's leather sole to whip you with. It makes a lot of noise and that's what we shall be wanting most of all. And another reason why I want that sole is that I may be better able to produce the desired sound by striking it against the chair or something, rather than against my baby's precious flesh. Unfortunately, I'll have to hurt you enough to produce the right effect on your bottom, but I'm not going to let you suffer any more than is actually necessary, my poor darling."

"Don't worry about me, Mommy, I'll be all right."

"Yes, you are all right," she said, emphasising the "are." "Mother is very proud of her dear baby. Don't you think you ought to go to sleep now, honey? Mommy has kept you up too long. She wants you to get a good night's rest. Tomorrow, poor dear, you have your undeserved ordeal, and mother wants your body to be thoroughly refreshed for it."

She led her back into bed, placed two light kisses on her eyelids, pushed out the light and walked quietly out of the room.

It was impossible to fall asleep. She tossed from one side to the other for an hour or more, her mind active with incidental yet important details for the eventful tomorrow, and her heart and mind overflowing with beautiful sentiments for her daughter. Both of these lines of thought struggled for first place in her mind, and she felt she wouldn't rest until she found some way to make a handsome gesture toward Betty for her bravery, sportsmanship and love.

Then there were the calls in the morning. She must phone Arthur and try to give him the gist of her extraordinary conference with Betty. He must understand that in view of her great effort tomorrow, he mustn't expect to see her all day except, perhaps, for a hasty hour somewhere in town. Then what about the article to be broken? It was a shame to smash deliberately her smiling Buddha with the enormous belly. Wasn't there something else she really would like to throw away before moving, something obviously costly but no longer of any interest? Oh yes, and she must caution Betty about discussions of Janet or Alice with Hester. The best policy would be to avoid saying more than was absolutely necessary for the moment. It wouldn't do to load Hester's mind down with too many people and things to think about at one time. Musing finally about her self-contained and resourceful friend, Louise, she fell asleep.

LEANOR was up and about in the morning long before her negro maid, Jennie, appeared for work. Fortunately, she didn't have to remain long alone with her exciting thoughts because she knew what an early riser Louise was, and she had no hesitation in phoning her just about the time the clock struck eight. Every detail of the conversation with Betty she communicated to her confidante, and an understanding was finally arrived at about the telephone call later in the day. She told Louise that she would send Jennie over for the leather sole, then called the maid in and told her in quick and general terms what her plans were. She instructed her to remain in the kitchen as much as possible, and not to venture forth to any other part of the house without first obtaining permission. Jennie knew, of course, what her mistress's problem with Hester was, but her mistress took no pains to describe the subterfuge that had been concocted for this day. She knew she could depend on Jennie's discretion, and if the maid raised any questions later she could determine the propriety of them at the time and answer or not as she deemed fit.

The next thing she did was to call Arthur, who was not altogether unprepared for her request to send Hester over. To be sure, he didn't know until this moment whether the Big Issue was to be met today or tomorrow, but he knew it had to be and would be, met. She told him all about her talk with Betty and the arrangements which this brave and beautiful child had helped prepare. She hoped to call him again in the afternoon and meet him for a short while so that she could begin telling him the full history of these twenty-four hours, and which she anticipated would take days and days to relate. Anyway, for the present, would he please put Hester into a taxi before he left for his office, and send her over. He asked her to wait on the phone while he made sure that she would go at once, and reported back that Hester was very willing. She much preferred being with Betty, even if she was three years her junior, than with her own colourless and quarrelsome girl friends.

While Hester was riding over and Jennie was on the way to Mrs. Gilmore for the whipping instrument, the commanding general of the entire proceedings went upstairs and gently awakened the light of her life, then while Betty was taking a bath her mother dashed off to the kitchen to prepare an appetising breakfast. At the table she couldn't take her eyes off her radiant child. She thought she never saw her look more wholesome, and her skin this morning had such a velvety peach

colour that it was all one could do to resist taking mouthfuls of it. Eleanor told Betty of her telephone conversations, that Hester would be over in the next half hour or so, and that she had sent Jennie to Aunt Louise's for the leather instrument. At the last minute Eleanor decided that instead of breaking poor little Buddha, Betty should break a service plate from their gold-and-lavender-edge set. She didn't care much whether she succeeded in replacing it from the store's crockery stock or not. If she could she would, otherwise she would give the entire set away to some deserving family. In any event, Arthur had two beautiful sets already.

Betty suggested that she induce Hester to stack up all the breakable ware and wrap protective paper all around each item that was going into the packing barrels, while she would do the packing. At a certain point she would begin with the set in question, at the same time developing a playful mood until she managed to break one of the big pieces. She even suggested to her mother that in view of the fact that it would serve her interest better if she had a real serious cause for punishing her, that she could talk back flippantly in the presence of Hester while she was being rebuked for her carelessness.

"What's this about talking back?" Eleanor frowned.

"I could talk back sort of disrespectfully."

"Disrespectfully?"

"Yes, mother, but only pretending. Don't you see?"

"Oh no, dear, I don't like that. Not even for make-believe. Promise me, darling you'll never think of such a thing again, not even in jest."

Betty ran forward to where her mother was sitting, impulsively dropped to her knees before her, put her face in her lap and her arms over her mother's thighs, and said: "I shall never even think of talking back to you, Mommy dear. You know I wouldn't do that. Please forgive me."

Eleanor leaned down and kissed her hair, then lifted her face.

"Of course I forgive you, honey. Now I think we ought to set the exact time for your whipping so I can phone Aunt Louise and tell her just when to call in. We may not have a chance to calculate it after Hester arrives. Let's see, then, if we were to fix the time for the breaking at 11:15 promptly and have you upstairs by, say, 11:18,—oh, for goodness' sake what's the matter with me! That doesn't make any sense! The safest way, of course, is to wait until I am actually ready to go up, and phone at that very minute to Aunt Louise. I am going to call her now and arrange it so that there is no conversation between us. All I have to say when she says hello is: 'All right, I am going up,' then

put the receiver right back on the hook. After that we can allow exactly thirty minutes until I am off the porch, ostensibly on the way to some errands. Yes, that's just right, and I shall phone Aunt Louise now and tell her to ring this phone exactly thirty minutes after I call her." She kept repeating these details nervously as she walked toward the telephone.

Betty heard the back door open and realised that Jennie had returned with that noisy leather sole. She had never been whipped with such an instrument, and couldn't help wondering what it felt like. Janet, of course, had told her many times about it, but she never got a picture of it that was really clear. The only thing she was sure of was that Janet disliked it more than her father's heavy hand, or the strap, martinet and hairbrush they also used on her. The chances are, thought Betty that she dislikes its broadcasting quality more than the pain it inflicts. Janet once said that even a blind man, dropped from nowhere within earshot of that leather sole, would unhesitatingly be able to say: Somebody is getting whipped!—even if the person at the receiving end never uttered a sigh.

For a moment she thought she would get an advance look at the instrument, but she saw her mother put the phone down, go into the kitchen and return in a minute, empty handed. She didn't dare ask to have it shown to her, and resigned herself to the prospect of making its early acquaintance only through sense of feeling, and not of sight. Janet tried to show it to her once when she was visiting at the Gilmores, but Aunt Louise unfortunately came right into the room at the moment, and it was "Bottoms Up" for Janet right on the spot. For messing around in drawers she was told to leave alone, said her mother, while she coloured Janet's big bottom a deep red with a hairbrush.

"Suppose we start setting out the china and bric-a-brac we are going to pack," said Eleanor as soon as she entered. "I've told Jennie to bring up two empty barrels and packing material from the cellar, and to put them in the dining-room. Come dear, we'll see what we can get under way before Hester arrives."

They worked diligently until they heard the front door bell ring, and in another second they detected the voices of Hester and Jennie in the vestibule. Betty ran forward to greet the girl who, beginning with Thursday, she could properly call Sister.

"I'm told you are going to put me to work," Hester called out gaily, looking over Betty's shoulder.

"You bet I am, and there's plenty for you to do. Betty darling, take Hester's hat. You've had your breakfast, I know, but would you like

something first, a glass of milk perhaps?"

"No, Aunt Eleanor, thank you. Just take me to my job, I'm bursting with energy."

"Well, aren't we glad she came, dear. Let's take her into the dining-room and give her an assignment."

Hester saw the barrels, the glass and crockery ware and so on, and began rubbing her hands, like a ditch digger preparing to sling his pick axe.

"Now what do you want me to break first, Betty my friend?" she asked. "I suppose you're going to be my foreman on this job."

But before Betty had a chance to answer, her Aunt Eleanor was speaking. "That reminds me, Betty my friend," she said with a broad smile, repeating Hester's salutation, "Be very careful with this stuff. Handle every piece gently, please, and don't let me hear you breaking anything, particularly anything of value. Come on, dear, get to work. I think you ought to pack and let Hester stuff the fragile ware while you are doing the other job. Will you children be wanting an early lunch?"

"It doesn't matter to me, mother," Betty was the first to answer.

"No, not much! How about you, Hester, dear?"

"I don't care either, Aunt Eleanor."

"Well then, I'll settle your minds for you. We will make it for one o'clock, that will give me a chance to get a few things attended to and off my mind. I am going to leave you alone now, children. If you want me for anything, I'll be either in the living-room or on the front porch. And remember, Betty dear, I want you to handle these breakable things with a great deal of care."

No sooner was she gone than the girls fell to chatting about the dozens of little things youngsters find always at hand for good conversation material. Hester enjoyed being with Betty, and for the next twenty minutes or so they worked and gossiped, argued and jested, all in high spirits. Pretty soon Betty began acting out the first part of her difficult role, taking up her task unflinchingly, like the brave little soldier she was.

The lavender-and-gold-edged dinner set was now receiving her attention. At her request, Hester was recording the number of pieces and the name of each size and style, while she wrapped them piece by piece and placed them in a barrel. She began twirling and balancing saucers and cups while keeping up a running fire of small talk, until Hester broke in to remind her to be more careful with those dishes. Betty laughed her off while she reached out for the large service plate. Taking it off the table with one hand, she balanced it on the thumb and

two fingers of her other hand, swinging the same arm forward and around in a graceful gesture. But, alas, it didn't work! Down went the plate, striking the rim of the barrel and glancing off toward a knotted heavy foot of a table leg. A loud noise, then a dozen small pieces where there was only one before.

The girls looked up, consternation and dismay on the faces of both. Through the door came the head of the house.

"What was that awful noise I just heard?"

Betty, the consummate little actress, seemed to be struggling for her voice.

"I am afraid there's been an accident, mother," she managed to articulate.

What's all this?" Eleanor's roving eyes spotted the broken crockery.

"That's it, mother . . . It's the . . . the large service plate . . . from the set." Not a word from Hester, incidentally.

"How did it break? Oh, this is terrible! What will I do? I asked you how did it break?"

"I guess I dropped it," weakly from Betty.

"How did you come to do that?" she asked, the tone of her question quite sharp.

"I was careless, mother."

"Oh, you were careless! How did she do it, Hester? Were you looking?"

"I—I believe it sort of slipped through her fingers," stumbled Hester gallantly through that answer.

"Through her fingers? You're not much help. I didn't think it slipped through her toes!" This was said with some asperity. "Now, young lady," she said, turning back to Betty, "suppose you tell me just how you happened to break that service plate."

"It was my fault," confessed Betty, looking down at the floor. "I tried to hold it up with my finger tips while carrying it toward the barrel."

"Humph! Practically went out of your way to break it, didn't you? And this after I asked you several times to be very careful. Go up to your room, please, and wait for me."

"Yes, mother."

"Hester, will you do something for me, please. Gather up those pieces, but save one out and wrap it up. I'll have to take time out—Lord knows when—to see if I can replace the plate in the stores. And when you have finished that, please pack the rest of the set in the barrel. We must try and get as much done as we can before lunch. Can I depend on you, because I may have an errand to do before we eat?"

"Yes, Aunt Eleanor."

By this time Betty's figure could just be seen turning the head of the staircase, and Eleanor walked toward the kitchen. Hester, quite subdued by the accident, started to do what she promised. She could neither see nor hear her aunt pick up the phone five minutes later, call Louise Gilmore's number, and pronounce these few significant words into the mouthpiece: "All right. I am going up." Hanging the receiver up gently, she took hold of the flat package Jennie had brought back and tiptoed softly up the back staircase.

Upstairs in Betty's room she found her obedient daughter already lying on the bed, wearing nothing but scant white satin knickers. On the table lay the famous leather strap. Her mother pulled up a chair quickly and motioned for Betty to get off the bed. As the child approached and made a gesture of spreading herself face down on her mother's lap, Eleanor stopped her and sat her up instead. Putting one arm protectively around the girl's bare thighs, the other around her neck she pulled her face over toward her own cheek, and whispered:

"We will have to watch our time carefully, my darling. We only have"—and she looked at her wrist watch—"twenty-three minutes. All the regular obligations are suspended this time, sweetheart. This is no disciplinary whipping, you know. Get up, dear, and fetch me the leather sole out of that wrapper."

Betty got off her mother's lap and went for the instrument. At last she was holding the darn thing in her own hands. It looked pretty heavy at the striking end, while the other end had gradually curled back into a sort of handle. She was startled to find that only on one side was the cowhide smooth, the other side had a definite pebbly, somewhat hairy surface characteristic of most unfinished leathers.

Eleanor fixed Betty over her lap in the best position, pulled her knickers down and off her legs, and took hold of the leather sole. She omitted presenting it first to Betty's lips for kissing.

"Now don't hesitate to cry, darling, if it hurts. Hester might as well hear that, too." This tactful suggestion Betty realised was tantamount to an order, while she settled herself for the painful operation that was about to begin. Her mother looked around first to make sure she had left the door slightly open, and then started. The first stroke came down with a startling explosion like a small firecracker. Both of them were unused to it, and both heads gave involuntary jerks. The stroke landed flat across the right cheek and imprinted a distinct outline of the instrument's shape. It was easy to see that fifty of those strokes would paint a beautiful coat of shiny red resembling lacquer. Eleanor began

alternating the strokes between right and left cheek, and up and down both thighs, placing each lash with a precision that denoted the master. The effect she produced was a tinting so even that a brush dipped in red paint, and wielded by an experienced painter, could not have excelled it. Eleanor, watching her own handiwork, was becoming unexpectedly partial to this instrument, particularly when she observed the genuine and spontaneous reactions of her patient. What was extremely disconcerting, however, was the unmistakable noise.

Betty, from the start, was aware that this instrument in the hands of experts like her mother or Uncle Fred Gilmore was no joke for amateurs. If it took experienced whippers to get the sharpest effects from it, it took experienced bottoms to tolerate it without bursting. It may have been because she was so unused to it, but she couldn't help feeling ashamed at herself for the violent quivering that overtook her sensitive muscles. She had intended to call out a few Ohs and Ahs, loud enough for Hester to hear, but to her great surprise she was pronouncing out loud one "Oooh, mother!" after another, and there wasn't the slightest bit of acting in any one of them. Her bottom felt hotter than usual, she thought, and she had no doubt it had swelled out by several inches.

The minute Eleanor was satisfied she had produced a good deep shade of red in Betty's bottom, she stopped. She placed the palm of her hand on each cheek and each thigh to gauge the temperature and then, satisfied, threw the leather sole on the bed and told Betty to get up. She took her on her lap again.

"This time, dear, no questions and answers such as we always have. I just want to know something about that leather sole. Does it hurt as much as it seemed, judging by your agitation?"

"Oh, mother dear, it stings dreadfully!" She was still breathing hard as she sank a tired head on her mother's warm breast.

"Perhaps because it is new, dear. You are not used to it. It shouldn't sting much more than a hand spanking, but then you hardly know what that is, either. I haven't spanked you since you were a baby, because I don't think my hand is effectively strong enough, but if you had had a father who spanked you often, I don't imagine this leather sole would have been so strange and difficult for you. Don't you think so, dear?"

"Maybe, Mommy, but this one hurt awfully much . . I feel so tired now."

"All right, darling. Get right on the bed. Unfortunately, today you can't have much opportunity to relax and rest, but you will be really uncomfortable for only a few hours, after all. When the heat and the burning subside, you will be nice and fresh again, just as you always

are, dear. The time is getting short. Let me see, I have eight minutes left. By the time I powder my nose and get my hat on, and by the time I've exchanged a couple of words with Hester—who must be white with the flames of her curiosity by now—I should just be able to get out a minute or so before Aunt Louise phones."

She helped Betty into bed where she made her comfortable over the coverlet. By her side Eleanor placed the strap, while she concealed the leather sole in one of the drawers. She combed some stray wisps of her hair back as she stood before Betty's mirror, and powdered her nose with her daughter's puff. Then she went over and kissed her baby warmly on cheek and forehead.

"Time for me to go, honey. Do the best you can with Hester, and remember I shall be in the next room listening to you both. I have so much confidence in you, my darling, that I don't want to tell you what to say. We will all meet again for lunch—I hope!" The last two words she pronounced with her eyes rolling upward. She closed the door and walked boldly down the front steps.

Hester was still in the dining-room sitting on a chair between the two half-filled barrels. She appeared to be at work stuffing and packing the assorted ware that stood around, but it was hard for Eleanor to take in with a cursory glance how much had been accomplished in the past half hour, intent as she was on fixing her hat and peering at her wrist watch. Nor could she tell whether Hester hadn't picked up the piece she was holding only when she heard Aunt Eleanor's steps on the staircase. There was no time, however, for idle speculation.

"Hester, dear, I am going over to the butcher's for some chops while Jennie is busy, and I also want to stop in and get the wrist band of my watch changed. I should be back at twelve-thirty. Oh yes, Mrs. Gilmore may call, dear. Will you answer the phone, please, and say I shall be back at about 12:45?"

"All right, Aunt Eleanor," Hester said, looking bewildered. "Where is Betty all this time?"

"I think she's either resting or dressing in her room. Don't forget about the phone." She was on the other side of the front door before Hester had a chance to say another word.

"Resting? Dressing!" were on her lips, but her Aunt Eleanor was no longer there to answer. She turned round and round, a frightened expression in her eyes. Her head lifted toward the top of the staircase, then turned in the direction of the front door. Suddenly the telephone rang. It was Mrs. Gilmore. "Oh, then you are Hester, Arthur Lacy's daughter, that your Aunt Eleanor has been telling me so much about."



*She dimly sensed this assistance as another link in the
chain that was being forged for her*

BETTY was lying face down on the coverlet of her bed, her arms wound round the top of her head. She was naked except for a narrow diaphanous scarf of cream coloured Japanese silk, so sheer that it scarcely diminished the bright red colour of her bottom and thighs. The contrast, indeed, with the skin of the rest of her back was, to say the least, startling. Parallel with her body lay a black leather strap, about a yard long. On a chair near the bed, at the far side, lay her pyjama jacket and trousers neatly folded, while on the reading table at the head of the bed stood a jar of cold cream and a box of dusting powder with large puff alongside. A thin film of powder on the edge of the table indicated that the puff must have been recently used, since nothing had happened to brush or blow it away.

In her right hand she was clutching a handkerchief dampened with her tears, and every little while she would glance up at a clock that stood within her range of vision on the dressing table. She listened to the seconds as they ticked on and on. Only two minutes ago she had heard her mother slip into her own room and pull a chair up to the door that led between them. Between sobs and gentle massaging of her tender bottom she strained to hear if Hester was still on the telephone but the door that opened toward the top of the staircase was closed and she could not detect a sound from downstairs.

A minute and another and another passed and Betty was beginning to wonder about Hester and what to do about it when suddenly she heard a sound which made her turn her face quickly toward the door. The knob was actually turning, softly and gradually. The door was opened about one quarter of the way and over the threshold peered Hester's golden-brown head.

"Come in," called Betty to her frightened and hesitant friend. She turned her head and upper waist around toward her visitor, but did not alter the position of the rest of her body. Hester came forward, breathing hard and looking sheepish.

"Sit down," said Betty, motioning with a nod of her head to the chair her mother had only a half hour ago whipped her in. Hester sat down on the edge, looking as uncomfortable as possible. She sensed her obligation to speak but did not know what to say. She looked pop-eyed at the naked body of her friend, then at the leather strap and her worst suspicion was confirmed.

"Then what I heard downstairs was true?" she gasped, incredulous still despite the evidence of sight and sound.

"If it's what I think you are referring to, then the answer is yes," replied Betty, making her voice loud enough to be sure that her mother could hear. She smiled at Hester.

For a very long minute there was complete silence. Hester's mind was struggling to grasp the wider implications of her suspicion. Her excited eyes tried to take in the whole room. Now they glanced at the strap again, now at the powder puff, now at the nude figure of her friend, and with the most intense concentration on her friend's red-tinted bottom and thighs.

"You . . . you . . . you are smiling?" she whispered.

"I always do. You know that," answered Betty, sparring for place and heedful of her mother's advice to let Hester lead this question period. She waited for the next, inwardly struggling, by the way, to ignore the still burning sensation in her whipped flesh.

"Your mother did . . . does . . . that to you?"

"Yep."

"And you don't resent it?"

"Nope."

"My God!"

More silence.

"Just for breaking a miserable old dish?"

"For much less than that, many times."

"For *less* than that? *Many* times, did you say?"

"That's what I said," Betty replied, lifting the last word with a care-free inflection.

"She beats you many times and you don't resent it?"

"In the first place, darling, you have it all wrong. She never beats me, she whips me—which is something altogether different. And I already told you I don't resent it."

"Why, how can that be? I . . . I don't understand . . . a big girl like you. And such a sweet, lovely girl, too. A person has to be a . . . a monster!"

"I love my mother above everybody and anything in the world."

"You must be crazy!" snapped Hester, stamping her foot, her temper seeming to mount with impatience. "You talk as if you're used to it . . . just had a massage or something! For God's sake, what does this mean?"

"Well, I *am* used to it . . . sort of. Been getting it since I was a little kid. As mother says, I was brought up on a diet of leather and milk . . . Now look at me!"

"Maybe I'm crazy, maybe I'm only imagining things," she pushed

back in her chair and crossed her legs with a jerk. "All right, when you were a kid, but you're grown up now. Whoever heard of a girl your size and age being whi . . . punished as shamefully as this! Why, even if you committed the worst crime, you shouldn't be outraged by . . . by . . . oh, say something, for goodness sake!"

"What can I say, Hester, except that I'm resting, as I always do for a while after I've been whipped. Since I've known you that's happened several times. Didn't you see me come back always happy? That ought to tell you something, if you'll take a little time to think about it. My mother has always been very strict with me. She brought me up by a system that was used on her when she was a girl, and on her mother, and on her mother's mother 'way back and on thousands or millions of other girls. I don't see anything terrible in that. Some day I'll have daughters, and I'll whip them hard and often, just the same as I get whipped."

"Gosh, I can't understand how you can lie there like this, so unper-perturbed, as though you've just come from a bath or something!"

"You're not altogether wrong, Hes. It does feel like a bath I've been through, only a darn hot one. And don't think I'm so calm, because my bottom still hurts like the dickens, as a matter of fact."

"Oh, shame on you, to talk like that! Humph! There's your result! You lose all sense of shame, and . . . and, what's more, I don't believe you're telling the truth when you say it hurts. After all these years I'll bet you're hardened to it. She's made your skin so tough that you don't feel it anymore than if you were beaten with a feather duster." She rose in anger and began pacing the floor.

Betty laughed.

"Oh, Hes, darling, forgive me for laughing. Would you like to feel for yourself to see how tender the places still are that were whipped a little while ago. Believe me, it still hurts just as much as it always does, and ever did. And it's supposed to, see the point, Hes? I was careless when mother warned me to be careful, so she punished me. I deserved it and I got it, and that's that. I'll be whipped again tomorrow or the day after, or next week, I know it, and I'm not one bit worried."

"Mean to lie there calmly and tell me this goes on week after week, for years and years, and for nonsensical little things, too?"

"Sure thing. And I'm thriving on it, what do you think of that? Good for my complexion and keeps me young, see? Aw, come on, Hes, don't be such an old grumpy. It hurts me, not you, and I'm not kick-ing."

"Now look here, Betty, I don't know whether you're really dumb or

just pretending, but I wonder if it has entered your pretty little head to think about me, and why I've got a darned good right to be excited. How can I ever look your mother in the face, now that I know what I know. And what about dad? What's he up to? Gee, if I let my mind run, I could think up all sorts of horrid things."

"Well, I think I've rested enough. Will you hand me my pyjamas, Hessie, darling? I am going to get up so I can answer you better." She reached over for the powder puff, dipped it into the box, and patted more of the fragrant fluffy powder over her naked bottom and thighs. With the palms of both hands she rubbed it gently in, then sat up to put the jacket on. She got off the bed and stood up to slip her shapely legs into the pyjama trousers, then hooked Hester's arm in hers and led her to a chair near the door between her room and her mother's. After pushing her down in it, she went for the chair her mother had whipped her in. She pulled it near Hester.

"I'm going to try and sit in this if it doesn't hurt too much," she began, letting herself down gingerly, her eyes and face lighting up with her infectious smile as she tested out her weight on the chair. "You were saying something about my being dumb. I don't think I am, Hessie dear, because I feel I owe so much to my mother that I could never repay her, no matter how long I lived. No, darling, I repeat, I could never be too grateful for what she's done for me. You were saying I get whipped for nonsensical little things. Nothing of the sort. They may seem like that to you, but don't you believe it, they're very important for me. I need them just as I need exercise or food or air. Every time mother whips me, and that's quite often, it hurts like the devil, and you'd think it would discourage me. Well it doesn't. All I have to do is go and look at myself in the mirror, to see how healthy I am. Or better still, look at mother. She was whipped hard until she got married, several times a week, all her young life. Now see what it's done for her. How old do you think she looks?" She reached over for the pillow, tucked it under her seat on the chair, and looked much relieved.

No answer.

"Mother is thirty-seven. Would you believe that?" Betty continued, ignoring her silence. "She doesn't look a day over thirty, her friends tell her, and I think she looks even younger than that."

"Are you trying to make me believe you are resigned to being—" she gulped, unable to pronounce the real word, "punished like this till the day you get married?"

"Yes, I am, because if mother thinks it's all right, then it is all right. I

hope to obey her as long as I live—in principle, I mean, for I'm always getting myself into trouble, anyway. Then you were saying something about your dad, my dad also after Thursday. Well, he's going to be my dad and he has a right to know what's going on. Whatever mother told him is O.K. with me, and if she should ever want to whip me in front of him, I'll have to try and get used to it, that's all. It may be hard the first or second time, but if I try to remember that he's my mother's husband, I oughtn't to fall apart from shame or humiliation. Whatever it is, I'm sure it will wear off after the first few times. Mother never tires of teaching me that patience is a virtue, and I expect I may have a good chance to try it out pretty soon."

"Good Lord, Betty, I had no idea you were such a phlegmatic person."

"You ought to come and see me get whipped sometime, you wouldn't think I was very phlegmatic."

"God, how can you talk like that, Betty!" she raised her voice in exasperation, and kicked the carpet viciously with her heel. "You must be utterly shameless." She began to cry, vexed at herself for saying such a thing to the girl she had come to be so fond of, and frightened by her prospect of the future. A terrifying disquiet invaded her being, and she recognised that it must have instinctively begun when her eyes first perceived that awful-looking strap lying on the bed. She struggled to ask the question that was now uppermost in her mind, fearing that the very asking of it might imply the possibility of an unimaginable, intolerable, design against her own person. She fished around in her mind for a way to extract a note of reassurance. She tried blustering.

"Any woman tried anything like that on me, I'd gouge her eyes out!"

"Not mother's, Hes?"

"What are you trying to say?" Her body pitched forward in her chair almost to an angle of 45 degrees, her left hand fiercely clutching Betty's thigh.

"I'm not trying to say anything, Hessie dear. I'm merely wondering if you are bitter at mother because of what she does to me." This was a clear evasion, but it was clever enough for it served to get her out of a tight spot.

"You've been doing all you could to prevent me from sympathising with you, and I guess it's hardly my business to tell you what is good for you. If you tolerate these horrible ordeals, then . . . then I don't know what to say."

"Oh dear, that's kind of funny. Suppose, just suppose, I refused to tolerate them. What could I do about it?"

"Well I can't talk for a little sap like you, but a girl with any spirit would run away, no matter what happened afterward."

"Then I guess I'm a sap and I have no spirit. It's a funny thing, Hes," and she leaned forward and took the agitated girl's hand in her own, "but I don't feel insulted or hurt by what you've just said. I suppose that ought to prove what you called me, and yet I'm sure you are wrong. That's why I ask for a chance to defend myself. Just see what I've got by not running away, or trying to gouge mother's eyes out. I've always had a wonderful home, the best clothes mother could afford for me, the best food, the best presents, the best attention, wonderful health, happy times, good playmates and friends, and best of all, the most wonderful mother in the whole world. Since that's true for me, how can I get offended when you call me a sap and a girl without spirit?"

"All I can say is, there's no accounting for the queer tastes of queer people. Your mother beats you three or four times a week and you think she's wonderful." Hester was running true to form, giving a good exhibition of the stubbornness her father spoke about when he first met Betty's mother. It simply blinded her to all reason. Even Betty, the most sweet-tempered child in the world, was exasperated by it, but she held her peace, remaining the tactful diplomat she had demonstrated several times before.

"Aw Hes, darling, you mustn't say 'beat.' I told you that. One *beats* another with a club or with his fists. All mother does is whip me with a leather strap on the fleshiest part of my anatomy which is well stuffed, believe me, to receive it without worry about any bad consequences. And I don't know what you mean by queer. If loving my mother above everything else in the world makes me queer, then that's all right with me too."

This was something, of course, that Hester couldn't, or refused to, see. Hers was a simple mind, she told herself. Anyone that so much as raised a hand to her was obviously her enemy, and that was that. And what bothered her secret mind right now was not whether Betty liked being whipped or not, but what were her father and stepmother's intentions toward her. A silly question, really, because, after all, she was almost eighteen. They wouldn't dare! . . . but what would she do with her continuous embarrassments in the case of Betty? Where would she hide herself at those moments when Betty was sent upstairs, while the little fool was letting herself be tortured, when she came downstairs again, and worst of all, in the bedroom at night that they would be sharing? To say nothing of the obligation to converse with,

even to smile at, the woman who was the cause of all this present and future misery. Oh, why did she have to be such a . . . such an unnatural person! She started to cry again.

Betty rose, came over to Hester, sat down on her lap and put her arms around her neck.

"Oh, Hester, don't cry, darling. I'm the only one that's supposed to cry. Don't be like that, please. I love you so much. It would break my heart if we couldn't be friends."

Those words, whispered softly down Hester's neck, were not without effect, for she loved Betty too, in spite of all the nasty things her temper caused her to say.

"How am I going to look at your mother?" she sobbed.

"You mean 'Aunt Eleanor', darling. Don't say 'your mother'. Your dad is going to be my dad, and my mother is going to be your mother. How are you going to look at her? Nothing easier, dear. Get back downstairs and just pretend you don't know anything when she comes in. That's the only thing to do right away, and it will give you a chance to think and maybe talk with me, as I hope you will. Anyway you won't have to decide in a minute or two what attitude to take if mother or Uncle Arthur should raise the subject in front of you. Promise me, Hes darling, to talk with me first before you say or do anything rash. Will you promise?"

"I promise, Betsy dear." It was the first time she called her Betsy. She pulled her head down and kissed her hotly on the cheek, wetting Betty's face with her tears. It was the reaction to an anguished half hour.

"All right, Hes, don't stay up here too long. Mother may come in and complicate things." She raised herself carefully from Hester's lap and walked to the bathroom where she soaked a washrag in cold water. In a half minute she was back and washing Hester's eyes and face. Then she pulled her toward the dressing table and handed her a compact.

"Hurry down, dear, and do what you were doing before. I am going back to bed and relax a little before lunch. Mother said I could stay here and that she would call me."

She slowly raised one leg after the other on the bed and fixed herself face down again, stretching her body at full length. This time she wore her pyjama coat and pants. She waved a kiss to Hester as she started for downstairs. Her attentive ear caught the sound of her mother stirring in the adjoining room, and she knew that she must be hurrying down the back stairs and out the back way to the street. Meanwhile, Hester had resumed her work in the dining room. It was lucky for her that she yielded to Betty's warning for she wasn't at it more than two

or three minutes when she heard her Aunt Eleanor coming in the front door, and in another second or two saw her walk toward the kitchen carrying a package—the chops she spoke of, no doubt.

The next thing she knew the woman who had given her the worst half hour's anxiety in her young life was standing before her, and she, unhappy thing, had to put on a poker face,

"Oh, there's still so much to pack, isn't there?" were Aunt Eleanor's first words, looking around the room. "Are you hungry, dear?" she said, changing the subject and doing Hester the favour of sparing her the necessity of lying. "Lunch will be ready shortly now. I'm afraid I'll have to rush off again this afternoon,"—she was burning with impatience to report to Arthur and Louise—"but I'm not afraid that Betty and you will be lonely without me." She shifted a pile of dishes nearer to Hester.

"Why hasn't Betty come down all this time, Aunt Eleanor?" She couldn't resist the temptation to ask the dangerous question, and no sooner had she asked it than her heart jumped into her mouth. She didn't want the right answer, no, no, no! Besides, hadn't she promised Betty? Oh, what a fool! But her Aunt Eleanor was too quick for her, for which she breathed a thankful sigh of relief when she noticed that her question was evaded.

"Oh, she's still upstairs, isn't she? I must go in to her right this minute. I want to change my dress anyway before lunch. Keep right on with these dishes, will you, dear?"

This was her perfect excuse for getting to Betty whom she was dying to hug. She was grateful to her foolish stepdaughter for her spiteful question, for that's exactly what it was. She rushed in and threw herself on Betty's bed. Giving her child no chance at all, she got her arms under her shoulders and smothered her with kisses. The girl couldn't have uttered a word no matter how she tried.

"Oh, you precious darling! I would go through fire for you a thousand times, with a smile on my face, just to show how much I love you! Oh, my lovely baby, what would I do without you!" She kept kissing her face and hands, wherever she could find a space. Finally Betty got a chance.

"Then I did all right, Mommy?"

"All right? It was perfect! You have more ability and more good sense than ten thousand grown-ups."

"You don't think so when school begins, Mommy, and I bring home bad reports." She patted her mother's face.

"You never bring home bad reports dear," she remonstrated. "They

are not good some times, but they are never bad. I only whip you to urge you on, don't I?"

"Yes, Mommy, that's right."

"Darling, it breaks my heart not to let you rest, but you must get up now. Lunch is about ready. Can I help you dress, sweetheart? Lie there another few minutes," she said, without waiting for an answer, "and I'll help you on with your stockings and girdle." She partly dressed her as though she were still her three-year old, leaving her little to do except slip her dress on, comb her hair and put some powder on. While Betty was doing that she made herself ready in her own room, and she arranged to be downstairs a few minutes before her daughter.

When Hester saw Betty come in to the dining-room she was breathless with amazement. This wasn't the same girl she left in bed! This one had just stepped from a bandbox, she looked the perfect product of a personal maid's attention—bathed, powdered, massaged, manicured, dressed! True enough, she had seen Betty look fresh and beautiful before, when she came down from her bed of pain (now that she knew what happened upstairs each time), but she never looked as resplendent as this. Positively,—but that was absurd!—she seemed to look better after a whipping than at any other time. Her amazement didn't diminish when she heard the world's cheeriest voice:

"Hello Hes. How's tricks? Gee whiz, haven't you finished with that packing yet? Where's mother?" Then poking her head toward the kitchen, she called out:

"Hey, mother, when do we eat? I'm starving."

Her mother came right in and put her fingers around Betty's neck. "You're always starving, aren't you? I'll have to see a doctor about her, Hester. Maybe he'll give me some pills to reduce her appetite."

"That's for later, mother. What do we get for lunch now, is what I want to know."

"I don't know. Maybe I'll scrape up an old piece of bread for you. Come, Hester, we're eating very informally in the breakfast room, what with all this dirt here."

Throughout the lunch Hester was the one who had the least to say. Her heart was too heavy with the knowledge she had suddenly acquired. What a strange pair they were! The funny part of it was that no one observing them as closely as she had could doubt the genuineness of their affection for each other. It seemed that every time Betty moved her little finger to the left instead of to the right, she got a terrible whipping for it. Her mother deliberately tortured her, she accepted it with the utmost docility, and as soon as it was over the victim was

as fresh, if not fresher, than ever. Torturer and victim were fast friends again—in fact, it was difficult to find a time when they weren't—and it looked like nothing more casual than a debt incurred and the debt paid. What a pair!

She was too absorbed in these reflections to notice that they made no effort to draw her into their conversation. Ordinarily, that could never have happened, but little did she know what conspiracy had been hatched that day. Soon after coffee was served—Betty and Hester had milk—Eleanor announced that she had to go out. She asked the girls what they preferred doing the rest of the afternoon until Uncle Arthur met with them for dinner, since packing barrels was no longer the important detail in the stage setting she prepared that morning.

While Betty jabbered away to Hester about what to do, her mother went out to the porch to do a little thinking undisturbed. It didn't take her long to decide that the girls must be got off somewhere that would prevent them talking further about the events of the morning. A big hurdle had been overcome successfully, to crowd that success might be dangerous. Let the knowledge so far obtained sift down slowly, no sense packing it to suffocation. Tomorrow was another day. It was a very wise decision.

“Look, children, I've decided what I would like you to do this afternoon.” She knew she could depend on Betty to understand that statement the way it was phrased as an order. “I am going to try to meet Uncle Arthur earlier today, and I think we'll have dinner downtown. It will simplify matters a great deal if you children would go to a movie in town so as to be handy when we are ready, and so we can have an early dinner. Darling, will you play host to Hester? We'll all go down together and I'll leave you at the theatre. Here's some money, dear. Put your hat on, like a good girl. You too, Hester.”

No use talking, thought the latter, she has a way with her. The next thing she knew they were in a cab, and the next thing after that, she was being asked to get the tickets. While the others waited in the lobby, Eleanor had just enough time for one word of instruction. “Discourage her from returning to that subject any more this afternoon. I'll explain later, after dinner.”

She kissed them both and left.



BY THE time she went to bed that night Eleanor had made very satisfactory progress. After she deposited the girls at the theatre she hastily taxied over to Louise's. To her she made a detailed report, Louise drawing the optimistic conclusion from it that her friend would have less trouble with Hester than she had been anticipating. While Eleanor liked to hear such an opinion, she remained unconvinced. She was obliged to admit however, that there was much comfort to be drawn from the evidence that Hester did not go off into an unmanageable tantrum. At this conference it was decided to send Janet over to the MacAllisters for the following afternoon; in the evening there was going to be a pre-wedding dinner at a downtown hotel to which the Gilmores and the Kents with all their children were invited. Arthur and Eleanor had made this decision only the day before, for they planned to leave for the seaside immediately after the civil ceremony. At her conference with Louise they also decided that Betty and Janet should discuss their whippings daily in the presence of Hester. Louise promised, besides, to instruct her Janet to avoid embarrassing Hester with pointed questions. She also agreed to run over to Caroline Kent's house and tell Caroline what instructions she should issue to the children for the evening. In nearly all respects their attitude toward Hester was to be that of Janet and Betty. Inordinately proud as Eleanor was of her daughter, she couldn't help having some doubt as to the ability of the other children to carry out delicate assignments in the manner Betty demonstrated with such distinguished success.

Leaving Louise finally, she hastened to Arthur's office. He had been awaiting her with an eagerness that drove him to distraction, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that he attended to the more important matters of the day. As soon as Eleanor came in he sent out word that he was out to everybody and did not wish to be disturbed, excepting by his secretary when she deemed it absolutely necessary. He consented to everything, of course, and enthusiastically agreed to follow all her instructions. Needless to say, he was overjoyed with the faultless manner in which the morning programme had been carried out and with the results achieved. If it were possible, he was more surprised than anyone else at the comparative mildness of his daughter's reaction to the knowledge she suddenly received. He expressed fear, however, that she might begin brooding over it, and that he might catch the full brunt of such a mood either tonight or the next day. Eleanor rose to that occasion also, like the brilliant commander she was. She reassured

him by saying she would speak to Betty about it, instruct her to persuade Hester to pretend ignorance before her father tonight, and that they could absolutely rely on their little lieutenant to carry out the instructions successfully.

At the proper time they left the office and walked to the hotel where she had arranged to meet the children after the show. On the way she told Arthur about the arrangement for Janet the next day, and that it would be his task to see that Hester stayed over with Betty tonight and spent the next day with her also. She had a feeling, she said, that nothing but good could result from a night in bed together so soon after the events of the morning. It must be obvious, she argued, that once Hester was in bed beside her friend, she couldn't help advertizing to what had happened, and that her taking the initiative would afford her competent daughter every opportunity to comfort the distressed young innocent. She also reminded Arthur to take Hester on the side under some pretext for two minutes the very moment they met, so she could have an opportunity to tell Betty to persuade her friend to say nothing about what happened that morning, and to pretend to know nothing in case anyone hinted.

The moment they met Betty ran over to kiss her Uncle Arthur, while Hester stood moodily aside, but only for a second, however, because she heard her father call her. He wanted to give her some money before he forgot, he said, to settle local bills tomorrow at the stationer's and drug store. Even while he said it he knew he would have to pretend to change his mind later in the evening when the question would arise about her sleeping with Betty tonight, for, obviously, she couldn't attend to these things on Wednesday if she was going to spend it with Betty and Janet. But it served him well as the first handy pretext to enable Eleanor to issue her instructions to her daughter.

Arthur had his first sign of Betty's coöperation when he saw how she arranged to fall behind with Hester while their elders walked ahead. They knew they could count on her to persuade Hester not to make a scene with her father, just as she didn't make any with her aunt. It would be futile to do anything about it now—so the argument should run—better to study the whole question slowly, let events take care of themselves, prepare the best method of solving the next problem when it arose, and so on and so on.

It must have worked because the evening went off without a single untoward incident. Hester wasn't quite as relaxed as she usually was in the presence of Betty, and even a not too observant person could have detected an air of thoughtful abstraction in her manner. Fortunately,

no one around her seemed to notice it. At a proper moment Eleanor introduced the subject of her packing problems, and Betty seized upon it as her cue to ask her mother to please let Hester come home with them. In the same breath, almost, she made a like winsome plea to her father and to Hester. To the great relief of everybody, Hester was not unwilling, and nobody bothered to remark that she might have accepted the invitation more graciously. They parted before eleven, Arthur not forgetting to ask his daughter to return the money he gave her as he would have to attend to those errands himself in the morning. He reminded her, however, to be home before six tomorrow to give them both time to dress for the big dinner.

Before Eleanor retired she instructed Betty to prepare Hester for Janet's visit. She left them alone, asking if they wanted some milk before going to bed, but both declined. When she finally stopped in to kiss them goodnight and see if everything was in order, Hester and Betty were already lying side by side in the latter's capacious bed.

"Get a good night's rest, children. There's plenty to do tomorrow, and I think I'll phone Aunt Louise in the morning and have her send Janet over before lunch. We'll make her help."

"Oh, that's swell, mother! Let's have Janet by all means."

"Yes, I think I shall, sweetheart. Goodnight. Goodnight, Hester, dear."

The minute she was out of the room Hester turned to her friend.

"Tell me something about Janet. I asked you several times about her and your other friends, and I never did get much of an answer. Now I have more reason than ever for asking. If she's your friend, she probably knows about your . . . eh . . . slavery. Does she?"

"Oh, Hes!" she burst into a silvery laugh. "What a word! Where did you ever get it? Whew! Such an imagination!"

"Well, it's something like that, anyway," she stubbornly persisted. "But what about Janet?"

"Sure she knows."

"Well, what does she think of it?"

"Thinks nothing of it."

"Mean to say it doesn't bother her at all?"

"It doesn't bother her when I get whipped, but I have no doubt it does when she has it."

"What?" she shouted, jumping up in bed on her knees and glowering fiercely over her companion. The shout was so loud that it must have been heard by her Aunt Eleanor in the other room.

"Yes, she gets whipped too. More often even than I do, I think,"

amplified Betty quietly, not moving from her place.

"Wh . . . wh . . . what kind of girls are you, what kind of mothers do you have, for heaven's sake?"

"Janet's a nice-looking, healthy young girl, and her mother is a very likeable person. Shall I introduce myself and my mother, or haven't we already met somewhere?"

"Look here, Betty, what are you trying to tell me? I don't believe a word you say. You're just teasing me, that's what you're doing."

"How do you think I got my bottom looking the way it did yesterday? Think I did it myself with red paint? Then it must be full of some acid or something, because it certainly smarted like the deuce."

"No, I don't mean you, although if I hadn't heard with my own ears, and seen you with my own eyes, I wouldn't believe that, either. But what I can't imagine is that there's another milksop like you in the world."

"Okay. You'll see the other milksop tomorrow and you can talk to her yourself."

"Yeah, sure. It'll be a put up job." She laughed nervously. It seemed she wasn't too sure of her skepticism.

"Shall I ask mother to settle the argument?"

"Oh no, for God's sake!" It must be true, whether she liked it or not. "All right, then tell me more about her." She gripped herself for the story, biting her lip, and remaining on her knees in bed.

"Relax then, so we can both be comfortable," said Betty as she reached out and unbalanced Hester so she fell over on her side. She moved over into a normal position. Betty began by enumerating the salient features of her friend's home life, telling Hester about as much as she told her father the other day. This time, instead of constant interruptions, she was listened to by a girl who was positively spell-bound. And when Betty introduced Hilda, the Swedish maid, Hester just gasped. When she finally found her voice to ask questions there was less asperity and more wonder in it than before. Betty noticed it and drew the proper conclusions, that at least sufficient progress had been made that Hester was beginning to accept the reality of corporal punishment.

"Then is that the reason she gets it more often than you—her father gives it to her also?" she whispered the question. Betty reckoned that was the reason. "Oooh, how dreadful!" This also whispered. She moved closer to Betty and put an arm around her waist as though seeking to hide from some ugly shadow.

"Don't be silly, Hes darling," answered Betty cheerily. "Janet doesn't

think so, I don't think so, nobody else thinks so. All she doesn't like is that darn leather sole which advertises to the neighbours that her dad is whipping her again."

"Oh, how disgusting! And that's the only thing she doesn't like, is it? Otherwise it would be very delightful, I suppose."

"I didn't say that, but I will say that I'd bet she'd miss a whipping if she didn't get one for a whole week."

"What is this, something like olives that taste bitter at first, then you start liking them?"

"You're not far wrong. I don't know whether I can explain it but I'll see what I can do for you. Anyway, sometimes the whipping hurts so much you think you're going to die, then it becomes a sort of test of your endurance, and you feel proud of yourself when you come out able to stand and answer questions. Besides, the intense heat and burning and the lumpy heaviness in your bottom, which feels as though the cheeks were full of hot lead, give you a pleasant languid feeling difficult to describe. At the end you feel a happy contentment which is curiously enhanced, rather than diminished, by the simmering heat and painful tenderness wherever the strap visited with its bite. And when you've fully rested you feel as fit as a fiddle, like after a hot bath and experienced vigorous massage. As a matter of fact, it's just grand for the complexion."

"Sounds wonderful, I'm sure, but don't ever expect to sell it to me. If it's all the same to you, I'll take face creams and stick to the old fashioned way of bathing and resting." She tried to make her words sound very sarcastic.

After this there was a lull. Betty had no wish to keep this up all night, and she felt Hester had acquired enough additional information to hold her for a while. In the morning Janet would be over and they would be tilting again. It would be nice, she thought, to have Janet's active support, her mother's moral aid being only what it must be under the circumstances.

Meanwhile Hester was thinking, too. There were many aspects of this bizarre situation she would have liked to inquire about, but she had to curb her curiosity lest Betty misinterpret it. Nevertheless:

"Did either of you ever see the other get punished?" she had to ask.

"Yes indeed, our families don't make any bones about such things."

"Well, I never!" She pounded the pillow with her fist. "I'm beginning to think they beat out not only your sins but the last bit of pride a girl can have. Now I know. It makes your skin so thick and tough that you think no more of these exhibitions than brushing your teeth in front of

each other. I should imagine a sensitive girl would just drop dead of sheer humiliation."

Betty let the insults pass. She did have a tongue, didn't she that Hester? For the first time she felt a glow of inward satisfaction that she wasn't that kind of a girl. Mothers like her own and Alice's and Janet's certainly knew what they were doing when they kept a strap swinging back and forth across their bottoms; too bad that Hester didn't have a few years of that treatment. But maybe her mother intended to remedy this defect, if so, she could count on her help all right, because she certainly wouldn't mind seeing her punished for these last insulting remarks. Insensitive, thick-skinned, huh! Oh well the best thing to do now was to go to sleep, maybe it was the lateness of the hour.

"Hey listen, Hes, let's not go into that at one o'clock in the morning. Come on, let's go to sleep. We'll talk about it tomorrow, and we'll have all day for it if you like." She changed her position and closed her eyes. Hester apparently did not wish to force the conversation, and it was no time before she noticed by Betty's regular breathing that she was asleep. After tossing some of her recent ideas around for a while she too fell into slumber.

They rose at 9:30, Eleanor letting them sleep undisturbed. The maid, Jennie, had a nice breakfast ready for them when they came down and they were told that Janet would be over by eleven. Eleanor expressed the hope that they would all work industriously to clean up the mess of half-packed barrels and that she wouldn't be around much, having so many other things to do. She managed to catch a scant five minutes with Betty alone from whom she got a skeleton report of their conversation in bed, and Eleanor just had time to caution her to see that she and Janet kept their conversation with Hester on a light-hearted basis.

When Janet arrived there was the noisiest reception. Betty had to drop in, a word at a time, her introduction of Hester between mutual congratulations that the joint plea to their mothers to let Janet come visit with them finally was granted. Hester was surprised to see what a big girl Janet was for sixteen. Except that her round young face revealed her youth, her size and figure marked the grown woman. She had to recommend her, besides a pair of full-blown breasts, ill-concealed beneath her tight dress, and a pair of solid and beautifully moulded hips, a shock of dark brown hair that sat like a crown on the head of a fairy princess.

Her Aunt Eleanor finally dragged her away by suggesting she got to the bathroom and wash some specks of dirt she perceived on her neck. It was just a pretext to follow and check with her on the instructions

she had received, and to give her some more, as well as to apprise her of the steps covered so far. Downstairs she excused herself so that the children might be all alone, but not before pointing out what she wanted done in the way of packing. She had no worry about anything being carelessly handled this time, knowing her daughter would take the utmost precautions.

Betty courageously set the machinery of education and propaganda going at once.

"How's your luck been breaking, Jannie, since I saw you last week?"

"Oh, you know, Bet, how it is. The usual average, three. I think, the last one last night from my dad. Seems the more practice he gets the more perfect he becomes. I used to think there was nothing more than perfect, didn't you?"

"What was it for? Anything serious?"

"No, he just didn't like the way I sat at the table, so he laid me out before he sat me up again, but oh boy, I was plenty hot by that time! How about yourself?"

"Me? Say, you should have seen the beauty I got yesterday morning for being such an awful dummy. You know what I did? I failed to balance a service plate successfully on the tips of my fingers, and since it was from a set I got paid out properly. Here, suppose you start emptying those two shelves and set all the glassware on the table, while Hes and I stuff them for the barrels. Is that all right with you, Hes?"

"Sure, anything." She wasn't trusting herself to say any more than she had to. In fact, she did her best to put on an air of abstraction, as though her mind were off on things far away. She had no idea, of course, how little impressed her companions were with that pose.

"Say, Bet, you should have been at our house Monday," resumed Janet, not forgetting their big assignment. "Aunt Caroline was over for lunch with Tony, so Hilda, the dumb cluck, lets herself in for a fine scrape. And Tony, who sometimes shows about as much sense as a goof, was the little man who set off the whole fireworks. It seems that while Aunt Caroline and mother were conversing in the living room and I was upstairs getting washed, he kept bobbing in and out of the kitchen interfering with Hilda. He made some sort of fencing pass at her with a fork from a carving set, she ducked and backed right into the handle of a small aluminium pot into which she had just finished shelling peas. Of course, the thing upset and, bingo!—no more peas. So she shouts at the top of her big voice: 'See what you've done, you little fool!' so loud that even I heard it upstairs. And that's not all I heard or saw. I just got down in time to see her holding him under her

arm like a small rug, and dusting his pants with her big right paw.

"I don't think she got a chance to wallop him more than a dozen times before she found the full audience on her hands. Well you know mother. It didn't take more than two minutes between trial and sentence. We work pretty fast in our house, you can bet. 'Bring me your dog-whip,' says mother in that harsh manner of hers. 'I'll teach you to raise your hands to your betters. It makes no difference how guilty Tony was.' Meanwhile, Aunt Caroline is asking mother if she'll lend her a good strap for her Anthony darling, and mother tells Hilda to bring a martinet along, too.

"She comes back right away with both instruments, and mother signals her to get on her knees on the seat of the armless stuffed chair. Mother pins her skirt over her shoulders pulls off the big girdle, and proceeds to give that enormous bottom of hers as fine a frying as I've seen in weeks. At the same time Tony is getting a hot massage on his squirming bottom, also. The kid was too scared to say Boo while his mother yanked his pants down, knowing it was all his own fault, really 'And wait till I tell your father. This is only a sample of what he'll give you tonight,' she said between licks. Gosh, Bet, when I think of that concert I can't help laughing again. That was one of the liveliest duets I ever heard." She burst into loud guffaws.

Betty joined her in laughter. "I can just picture Tony with four women around. It must have bothered him plenty. Remember what he told us once, that he wasn't afraid of being whipped if only his mother gave them to him, alone?"

"He meant people outside his family, not so much Alice and Jo, I think. He never did like any of us around, but it's certainly time he got used to his own sisters, considering the many times they've watched him get a smart workout."

"Yes, he ought to be, but his mother says he's still very uncomfortable when he's whipped in the presence of either or both."

Hester, during this conversation, was beside herself with a mixture of emotions. So the Kents observed these crazy methods methods, too! Why didn't that little cheat of a Betty tell her that before? She had to drag it out from her about Janet, but not a word about Alice, Jo or Tony whom she was only generally aware of as friends of hers. What kind of a world did she and father stumble into? Was it possible he knew all this and didn't object? How much farther, she wondered, did this plague of insanity extend. Did it stop with the Kents or did it go on and on? Meanwhile, she was eaten up with curiously to know the full story of the Kents, but hated herself for tolerating such an unworthy

desire. Her reveries were cut short by Janet.

"Listen, Bet, let's change the subject. This is probably boring Hester."

"Is it, Hessie?" asked Betty, jumping boldly into a pointed question.

"I don't mind. Go right ahead and amuse yourselves. I'm obliged to admit I don't appreciate your sense of humour, but it's interesting to see what some people think funny." These words had the loftiest sound about them, and were uttered with her eyes wandering all round the room but never looking directly at her companions. Her hands were busy disentangling some waste paper. Janet and Betty exchanged a swift look that seemed to express an ardent desire to smear a huckleberry pie over Hester's haughty countenance, but just at this moment the mistress of the house was approaching. Lunch was announced, the girls ran off to spruce up, and the conversation at the table took an entirely different turn as a matter of expediency.

For the better part of the afternoon Eleanor and Jennie the maid, assisted with packing of all sorts of odds and ends, and the subject which bothered Hester with such bewildering confusion was not referred to again. If only she could make up her mind whether she wanted to listen or not, and whether to make an issue of it with the girls by walking out, or showing her displeasure in some pronounced way. This was the knotty and irritating problem.

By five o'clock they had made such inroads into the work still remaining that Eleanor had no fear of Jennie being able to complete the rest by herself before the end of the week. She urged Janet and Hester to hurry so they could go to their homes and dress for the big party tonight. Within the half hour they had started on their separate ways.

The dinner was a huge success. They were fourteen at the table, consisting of the five Kents, the three Gilmores, the four principals, and two male friends of Arthur, one a bachelor, the other a summer bachelor whose wife was visiting in Montreal. Everybody looked his best and everybody was gay and congenial, except Hester. She was perhaps less attractive than the other girls, but that didn't matter nearly as much as her conspicuous lack of spontaneity. To be sure, the company was well-mannered enough to make no observations, and it is doubtful whether her apparent disquiet was noticed by Arthur's friends anyway. Hester, for her part, kept staring alternately at all the members of the Kent and Gilmore families with the exception of Janet, whom she already knew, in a manner of speaking. When addressed she answered with a slight start, being too busy in her secret appraisal of these amazing folk. What disconcerted her most was the astonishing



*The position was a supremely humiliating one for such a big girl,
while the stretched surfaces doubtless enhanced the pain*

naturalness of those people. It riled her terribly to find them that way. She would have been much more at ease in her own mind if they had proved to be devoid of personality, or disagreeable-looking in a physical sense. Instead, they were charming in a very positive way, and she felt baffled at the absence of a plausible reason for justifying an attitude of dislike and indifference.

The girls, as a matter of fact, tactfully included her in all their conversations which were always of a general nature, and they seemed to be unaware of her rather serious mien. Indeed, she found the Kent girls warm and likeable, with a manner of expressing themselves that evidenced a cultural background and a wholesome outlook on people and the world. Even Tony was a bright upstanding boy of about fourteen, who, if she didn't have to believe her own senses, could never in a million years be associated with such grotesqueries as whippings, bared bottoms, leather straps, and all the trappings of corporal punishment.

The time came when the party just had to break up. The men, with the exception of Arthur, had businesses to attend to, and for them tomorrow could only signify another Thursday. The feminine section of the party exchanged cordial kisses, Alice and Josephine particularly convincing to Hester in the manner in which they expressed their pleasure at meeting her. She was amazed at herself when she recalled, later in bed how warmly she returned their kisses. What a funny world this was!



LEANOR and Arthur, in the presence of their children, Louise Gilmore, and one of his friends, were married at 11 o'clock the next morning. Neither of them having any fixed religious sentiments, they wanted only a civil ceremony and that was what they had. Mrs. Gilmore and the two girls drove to the station with them where they took the train for the place where their happy romance began. In another taxi the older woman and her two temporary wards drove to the Gilmore home.

Janet greeted them with her usual effusiveness, then took the girls upstairs to wash and show them their room. Hilda carted their bags up after them, and Hester was able to observe their famous maid for the first time. No opportunity occurred for even a word with the maid because she no sooner got to their room than her mistress called up after her, and she raced downstairs. By the time they had arranged

their few things it was time for lunch, which was served by Hilda. Their host tried to put her guests at their ease with a lot of general chit-chat, and Janet who knew better than the rest, was quite sure her mother was pursuing a carefully-laid plan of her own. She was quite sure of something else, too, that the plan must include a demonstration on her own poor bottom, before she was twenty-four or forty-eight hours older, of what a whipping was like, all for the benefit of that sweet-natured guest of theirs, Hester Lacy.

Nevertheless, the first day passed without any unusual excitement. In the evening, when Uncle Fred came home, there was such an air of good fellowship that Hester could hardly believe the extraordinary tale she had heard from Janet's lips. Were it not for Aunt Louise's manner of barking out sharp commands to Hilda—confirming Janet at least in that respect—she would have thought this the happiest of households. Even Uncle Fred seemed to be a congenial person, certainly not the type that would beat his own daughter, and look on approvingly while a big twenty-four year old maid servant was being flogged half to death. On the contrary, he was amiable to Janet and even had a kindly word for Hilda. Only one minor incident seemed out of the ordinary. She noticed that immediately after the arrival of Uncle Fred, Hilda fetched his house slippers, got down on her knees, unlaced and removed her master's shoes and fitted the slippers on. No one but Hester was paying the slightest attention to this act, not even the head of the house himself. The evening passed pleasantly enough as far as Hester was concerned with her hosts continually around until bedtime. She wasn't sure whether she was pleased or annoyed by the interference of their presence with further discussion of that most questionable of subjects, the whippings of young girls and boys. At any rate, before retiring all three girls dutifully stood in line and kissed their elders goodnight.

However placid and pleasant and dull the day before may have been, the next afternoon produced enough excitement, Hester thought, to hold her for a lifetime. The girls spent the morning on the porch and on the lawn, playing games and talking about a lot of unimportant things. Aunt Louise came by a number of times and gave them what Hester suspected was a supervisory glance, and Hilda could be seen all around the place busy as a bee with her housework. In the early afternoon the maid got around to vacuuming the living room rugs. That is to say, she only started them, for no sooner had she turned on the current than her mistress called her away to help with her bath. When they were finished mistress and maid went downstairs, the former to

the telephone, the latter to the kitchen.

Meanwhile, the girls had returned to the interior, settling in the dining-room, while Janet started running back and forth to show them snapshots the family had taken last summer. Racing across the living room she stumbled over the heavy electric cord of the vacuum cleaner and brought it and herself down with a loud bang. At the same time Hester and Betty heard Aunt Louise still on the phone, stop and shout: "What's that?" Then:

"All right, Caroline, I'll have to hang up. My Janet is calling me for a good whipping, if I heard her correctly. She hasn't had her bottom scorched for a couple of days and she's getting restless. I'll call you later, maybe when I'm through with her." The next thing they knew she was in the living-room. She had to take but one look to understand what it was all about. "Where's Hilda?" she asked. But she didn't have to look far. The maid attracted by the noise had come forward and, judging by the melancholy expression on her face, was squaring herself for the trouble ahead.

"It's your fault as much as hers," snapped her mistress. "You absent-minded dolt! As far as you're concerned that cord could have lain like that all day. Get me your whip, and bring Janet's strap along also. And as for you," she said, turning to Janet, "how many hundreds of times have I warned you to watch where you're running. I'm going to try and remind you again on that hard-rubber bottom of yours, but I despair of it having any effect. You won't be satisfied until you've broken something of great value."

Before she was finished talking Hilda was back. Hester, transfixed, her face on fire from her blushing, stared in a fascinated manner at the maid and the instruments. Her fevered mind told her to run away, but her feet were like lead. She was afraid to look at Betty and afraid to look up at Aunt Louise. Suddenly she heard the latter speak words that settled all her doubts. "Hester and Betty, I want you to stay and watch me punish these simpletons. Maybe it will shame them a little to know you are looking on while their bottoms dance under the whip. Get up here, you!" The last sentence was for unlucky Hilda to whom this order was as familiar as her own name. Conveniently enough, the offence was committed in the room where the armless stuffed chair customarily stood. To Hilda it was a continuous reminder, no less than the dog-whip hanging under her nose in the kitchen, that physical pain was almost the daily price she had to pay for living with and working for the Gilmores. She lifted the front of her skirt and knelt on the seat of the chair, handing the two instruments to her mistress before she got

properly settled, Louise placed the dog-whip near her but threw the strap at her daughter. "Hold on to your strap and make yourself ready," she ordered. Janet took her dress off and stood in a corner wearing nothing more than brassiere, lace trimmed satin panties, rolled stockings and shoes. In her hand she held the piece of narrow leather that was going to stripe her flesh in a few minutes with red hot bands; and her face, instead of expressing fright as Hester expected, wore a faint grim smile, as though she were recalling that her prophecy of her present condition was perfect even if the direct cause for it had been unpredictable. Hester's eyes, and Betty's no less, roamed back and forth between Hilda and Janet. They saw Aunt Louise turn the maid's skirt back over her shoulders, reach in with both hands around her front and back waist, pull down the big pink rubberised girdle over those great hips, and saw Hilda aid her mistress by lifting one knee and then the other to get the girdle off her legs. Hester noticed at once that the immense field of flesh swelling forth from her bottom and thighs, after being released from the compression of the girdle, was a mass of light but varicoloured spots. Even her untrained eyes told her that these were the vanishing marks of her last whipping, only that they probably never vanished, thanks to Aunt Louise's special interest in that area.

Now the thrashing began. Hilda's mistress stood to the left of the kneeling figure, holding in her hand a black plaited whip that tapered down to an eighth of an inch and was tipped off with a knotted piece of fisherman's twine about three inches long. The whip swung out and started lashing away methodically across buttocks and thighs, striking sharply each time against the quivering muscles, yet with no more passion on the part of the executioner than if she were beating a rug. The size of Hilda's bottom by no means insured her against sensitivity to the whip's bite, for every time it contacted her flesh her big torso plunged forward and she had to renew her grip on the back of the chair, lest she fall off and provoke her stern mistress to additional punishment. Despite Hester's intense absorption in this mass of vibrating flesh, deepening in colour from stroke to stroke, she did not fail to note that though the victim cried and strained with all her might, she never begged for mercy nor vowed that she "wouldn't do it anymore." Did that prove the pain wasn't as excruciating as one might think, or that the poor girl was so cowed by her mistress that she didn't dare ask for remission of punishment lest that itself invite another?

While she was puzzling over this problem Aunt Louise ceased whipping her docile maid. Gripping her skirt under the armpits Hilda

descended from the chair that spelt her bed of pain, and now Hester was about to witness the most outrageous and at the same time, the most fascinating, spectacle of a free person's abasement. Still holding her skirt up way above her hips, Hilda sank to the floor on her knees, took hold of her mistress's right hand which she kissed, took hold of the whip which she also kissed, and then in a reasonably controlled voice, considering what she had just endured, said: "Thank you, madam, for the good whipping. I deserved it." And all she got for her pains was the curt, totally unsympathetic, response: "All right. stand in the corner now with your skirt up while I whip Miss Janet." Then turning to the other waiting culprit, she said: "Come forward, it's your turn now."

This time Aunt Louise sat down on the chair which only a moment ago supported Hilda's knees, while Janet approached, strap in hand, eyes fixed on the ground, and with her face flushed almost to the colour of Hester's. The pilgrim to *Strapland* now witnessed an entirely different procedure. Janet had to take her panties off herself, while Hilda had her girdle pulled off; Janet had to come and lay herself across her mother's lap, while Hilda had to stand partly and bend forward like a horse in order to expose her bottom for flogging. Janet arranged her bottom to her mother's right lap and not directly under her chin, for it was obvious that in such a position her bottom could catch most favourably the widest swing of her mother's good right arm. And so it was. The strap cracked down and down and down, striping Janet's bottom and thighs like a barber's pole. Hester was surprised to see how full and round these portions of her anatomy were. Never having seen them exposed like this, or in such a position, she had no idea of their real bulk. True, they couldn't be compared with Hilda's massive haunches, and unlike hers, these danced under the strap at a swift tempo that made Hilda's vibrations look like a funeral march. Now that Hester had seen Hilda's, Janet's and Betty's bottoms—the latter in repose only—she felt a sense of shame—of all the ridiculous emotions!—that her own was actually puny by comparison.

In due time Aunt Louise paused in her stroking and passed a hand over the roundly and soundly whipped surfaces of her daughter's bottom and thighs. Apparently she was satisfied that the heat was just at the right temperature, for she terminated the punishment with one last resounding cut right straight across the base of the bottom, which inspired Janet to let out her fanciest yell of the session. She, too, Hester noticed, had made no plea for abatement of punishment, although she did call out a number of times while being whipped: "Ooooh, mother, I'll be more careful! Aaaah, mother, I won't do it again!" These exclama-

mations she couldn't help making under the stinging effect of the strap, but she never asked to be pardoned, a lifetime of experience having taught her that pardon was never granted until after her mother or father were ready to receive her thanks for the punishment. That was the "Gilmore System," as she often remarked to her friends when they discussed their whippings. Janet didn't yell so loud that she couldn't hear her mother say that was all. She felt the imprisoning arm around her waist lift and she stood up,—that is to say, if one can call the posture of a slumping figure, slouching shoulders, and knees sagging, standing up. That long practice dictated the next step was immediately apparent to Hester; Betty, of course, being intimately familiar with all details. Janet placed herself in the most convenient manner that her mother might help her get seated in her lap, her own legs feeling too heavy to manipulate by herself. Then she put her arms around her mother's neck and kissed her face, and after that her right hand. Last of all, she took the strap from her mother's other hand, placed it to her lips and said: "I kiss the strap you whipped me with, mother, and I beg pardon for my offence." A flush of shame surged upward through Hester's body until she felt her eyes actually burn. Oh, what bitter degradation! To think that such a nice girl as Janet should stoop, or be made to stoop, so low! She'd rather cut her throat than utter such words, or make such gestures.

From where Hester and Betty stood they could plainly see the colour and puffy condition of Janet's bottom as it extended over her mother's lap. While the punished girl was completing the last phase of her chastisement, her mother was appraisingly sliding her hand up and down the exposed portions of the bottom and thighs. With the plea for a pardon and the granting of it finished, Aunt Louise was ready to announce her next order.

"You, over there! Put your girdle on and get back in the kitchen. And don't fail to make up for the time you've lost or I'll decorate your bottom all over again."

Turning her eyes back to Janet, she said: "All right, get off. You may go upstairs and rest for a half hour. Ask your friends to excuse you."

Janet stood up, looking a most unheroic figure in her costume of brassiere, stockings and shoes. One little fist was wiping the tears out of her eyes, the other hand instinctively clutched a top-heavy bottom cheek.

"Excuse me for a while, Betty, Hester," she sobbed. She turned away in the direction of the stairs, still holding her strap. Hilda, meanwhile, without leaving the room, was struggling unassisted to get that rub-

berised girdle back over her tender rump. It was a difficult and painful task, the rubber garment rolling back, even in her strong hands, while she tried to pull it upward over the widest part of her hips.

“You girls,” Aunt Louise was talking again, “may go out on the lawn or porch now and do what you like. The show is over. Janet will join you later.” These words were uttered with such matter-of-fact coldness, with such indifference to feeling, thought Hester, that Janet’s mother must have a pump circulating merely red ice water in her veins, instead of a human heart.

Outside, Hester couldn’t restrain herself. Her pent up feelings during the last half hour cried out for expression, necessitating the discard of all pretence. She began plying Betty with questions which the latter answered with her usual disarming frankness. To Hester’s punctuated sermons on sensitivity and her tirades on tyrants Betty paid no attention, counting on silence to wear her down rather than feeding arguments to stimulate her further. But when she asked questions like, why does Aunt Louise make Hilda wear that awful girdle, Betty gladly answered in detail. Aunt Louise demanded it because of her enormous backside, insisting that a strong girdle was necessary in order to keep all that flesh disciplined by permanent control of its contours. And when she asked about those marks on Hilda’s bottom and thighs, Betty told her that Janet called them the visiting cards of her mother’s dog whip, and that they never disappear entirely. They fade off rapidly because of the girl’s exuberant health, but in view of the fact that she gets whipped often, and soundly, new spots are laid on before the old get a chance to move out.

Steps near the summer door of the porch announced Janet’s approach. Believe it or not, she looked as fresh and as trim as though she had come from an hour’s fussing over her toilette, and that after a two hour nap. Hester could only stare dumbly.

“Hello, Bet, hello, Hes,” she called cheerily. “Hope you didn’t worry about me, Hes, ‘cause I’m all right. Used to this, you know. Say Bet,” all in the same breath, “you know what I was thinking while getting dressed? I was thinking how nice it would be if we could persuade our families to go camping for a weekend up at Falcon’s Cove. It ought to be jolly good fun, what?”

Hester was stumped. It was too much for her feeble brain. If only she could go off somewhere all alone for a month, and just think and think. But she didn’t get a chance to think two minutes, nor for the rest of the afternoon and evening. Hilda went calmly about her work, Aunt Louise about her affairs, the girls played at this and that, and toward

six o'clock Uncle Fred came home. Hilda ran forward to put her master's slippers on, while he inquired of his wife what kind of day she had had. This was the question that gave Janet much concern every evening. As though she were talking about a manicure, she remarked that she had whipped Hilda and Janet and why. The youngster looked worried, for she never knew when her father might take it into his head to yank her over his lap and give her a supplementary "shellacking," as she engagingly called it. To her great relief he just grunted his satisfaction that her mother had whipped her properly, and puffed up on his pipe. Betty listened with interest of course to this talk, but Hester felt so ill at ease that she could have welcomed a plunge to hell if only the floor would open up.

Nothing of importance happened that evening, nor all day Saturday and Saturday night. For Hester the long strain of uncertainty was causing her a great fatigue. She was happily relieved that she was spared further embarrassments, yet at the same time was unable to exclude for a moment the unforgettable picture of Hilda's and Janet's bottoms writhing and sputtering with the red flames those leather instruments engendered in their backsides. She was unable to suppress a keen desire to palpitate that whipped flesh, certain she would find the covering made of asbestos, not of skin. What beat everything was the extraordinary *sang-froid* of all these people!

In such a house dull periods couldn't last very long, and Sunday morning, right smack for breakfast, good old Hilda produced the customary diversion. Everything seemed all right until she got around to serving the coffee. She brought the cream pitcher in and poured her mistress's cup first, as usual. The cream was sour! Her usually stolid face nevertheless showed an eloquent picture of remorse and dismay.

"How do you explain this, please?" asked her mistress, pressing her lips while her eyes stared coldly at the hapless maid.

"I forgot to put the pitcher back in the frigidaire, madam. I'm very sorry. I hope you will punish me." She looked sincerely unhappy.

"I think your hope will be realised. Spoiled our whole breakfast for us, didn't you?"

"Yes, madam, I did."

"Pour us some black coffee, then, and see me in the living room before you wash the dishes."

"Thank you, madam."

Uncle Fred finished his coffee and took his paper into the living-room where he made himself comfortable in his favourite chair. The girls hung around the doorway between the dining and living-room. Hester

kept telling herself that no one asked her to stay, why didn't she walk out on the cruel spectacle? But an invisible magnet seemed to rivet her to the spot, and there was nothing she could do about it. In a minute or two Hilda walked in carrying her familiar dog-whip. She looked about, like the condemned walking to the execution block, and saw her usual audience augmented this time by the presence of their two young guests. Suddenly her mistress walked in and the business of firing up Hilda's large bottom commenced. The method followed was identical to that of Friday's whipping, but in Hester's estimation Aunt Louise seemed to give her more than she got then. Uncle Fred had put down his paper and was looking on, smoking his pipe easily as though he were watching a picture being hung. Hilda took all she received with her usual stoical attitude to the general principle of paying for her errors with smart whippings, but not stoically as far as the specific whipping of the moment which was engaging her undivided attention. To each lash of the dog-whip she responded with the usual lunge forward, the usual squirming of those massive gluteal muscles, and the usual cries.

When her punishment was over and she had expressed thanks she was sent back to the kitchen to finish the dishes. And, sure enough, looking in on her ten minutes later, the girls could see the big Swedish maid going about her work less energetically, of course, but with that air of tranquillity which characterised her simple acceptance of her mistress and her whippings. An hour later, Hester noticed something else which stuffed to the ultimate straining point her sensations of wonder. She saw Aunt Louise standing in the kitchen trying on a new dress with Hilda's aid, and something the girl said, which she couldn't hear, made them both laugh. Aunt Louise smiling broadly for a change, patted her maid's face in an affectionate manner, and as her palm grazed past the lips, the maid impulsively raised her hand and pressed a warm kiss into her mistress's palm. This was the highest proof to Hester of the servant's devotion to that unrelenting and unforgiving woman who was Janet's stern parent.

Hester watched hour upon hour go by after that wondering why Janet and Betty made no reference to the maid's punishment. Had they become so calloused to this sight—but no, that couldn't be because they were as interested observers as she was. Several times she felt tempted to break through the light patter with a question or an observation about Hilda but refrained. Then, toward the late afternoon, about five o'clock, a new storm broke. The circumstances that preceded it were of exceptional interest.

Janet was seized with a fanciful idea at a moment when Hester asked to be excused while she went upstairs to repair a run in her stocking. She turned hastily to her best friend, Betty, and whispered:

“Hey, I got a crazy idea. Wanna hear it?”

“Shoot.”

“If your folks come back tomorrow, this may be our last chance to write another page in Hester’s lesson book. I don’t like the airs she puts on, see, and I wouldn’t mind giving her a little more to think about even if I have to pay for it by getting my bottom shellacked again.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I was thinking what a cinch it would be to stir up my other boss, and let Hester see what a fast and furious operator he is. That oughta sorta straighten her out, see, so that when she comes to our house again, or to Alice’s, she won’t be too surprised.”

Janet had an irresistible habit of letting her conversation slide into slang, or otherwise mutilating English words for the fun of it. Many times it turned out not so funny for her, because if her mother or father caught her at it, she got a prompt whipping. The fact was Janet made very high marks in composition, and knew how to express herself in perfect English, but then she was Janet, and any disinterested observer couldn’t help recognising the charming personality behind that lovely face.

“I think the heat’s got you,” remarked Betty, dryly.

“I mean it, Bet. Should I accommodate? Hurry up before she comes back.”

“What do you think you’ll do?”

“Well, when my dad reads his paper he doesn’t like to be disturbed. Whenever I’m the cause he has a fast way of showing me his dislike that quickly burns me up, if you catch on. So, I thought, when Hester comes down, I’ll just stroll over to the radio and start dialling for some weak stations. Unless I’m awfully mistaken you gals ought to get another free show right away.”

“You’re pretty brave, Janet. I don’t think I could ever make an offer like that.”

“G’wann! What about that service plate you broke?”

“That wasn’t really my suggestion, I was just obeying mother.”

“Hurry up, Bet! Shall I do it, yes or no?”

“It’s your bottom, Jannie. I hate to say, but it would be good for Hester to see your dad at work.”

“Okay. Anything for a pal, you know me.”

“You certainly are a pal,” said Betty, admiringly. “Some day I hope to take the rap for you, just to show you my heart’s in the right place—

There she comes! Go ahead, and God bless you, my darling."

Janet rose and walked toward the living-room, giving her right hip a fond pat with her hand. Only Betty knew what she meant. Hester came over and joined her,

"Where's Janet going?" she asked.

"I think she's going to turn on the radio," answered Betty following the brave youngster with her eyes.

Suddenly everybody in that quiet house was startled by the powerful rasp of static from the radio in the living room.

"What are you trying to do?" they heard her father shout. His voice startled the girls by its loud and angry tone. They jumped up and turned to look in.

"I was trying to tune in for something, dad," Janet answered softly.

"I'll give you something to tune in for," he replied, angrily. "In fact, I'll tune you in myself so that you disturb the neighbours worse than that radio. Fetch me the leather sole!"

"It's not back yet, dad. You know . . ."

"Oh yes, I forgot. Keep quiet. Come here, then"

Janet walked toward him, face down, a dismal expression in her gait alone. He caught her around the waist, bent her torso forward over his left thigh by pressing his left hand between her shoulder blades, not too heavily, really, because well-trained Janet wouldn't resist; stuck his left foot on top of the footstool which was always placed at his chair, yanked back her skirt and yanked down her panties. It was all done in less time than one could describe it, and there was Janet in tip top shape for her father's trusty hand.

She had her expected audience, of course. Betty and Hester stood in the doorway, and her mother looked on from the centre of the stairs, having been drawn down to the scene by the noises. Only Hilda was absent, she, poor drudge, had to hear Janet's solo, without seeing, from the kitchen or pantry. Uncle Fred's arm swung up and down from the mountain height of his reach, the big palm landing just where he wanted it on Janet's fleshy posterior and thighs. They were mighty blows all right, thought Betty who never witnessed them without experiencing a shiver. Given a free choice, she was sure she would stick to her leather strap or martinet. Janet's bottom turned the colour of a ripe tomato, her lower body wriggled like soft custard, genuine tears rolled from the brave girl's eyes, and her frantic hands closed and opened, clutching the empty air. She probably got fifty cracks across the bottom and thighs, and they didn't take more than two minutes to deliver. But she received in that brief time, to use one of

her favourite expressions, a real steam baking, served up good and hot.

The last slap given, her father pulled her up, put his pipe back between his lips and began rearranging the leaves of his paper. Janet, meanwhile, readjusted her panties and pulled down her skirt. She reached forward, put her arms around her father's neck and kissed him on the cheek and on the still hot palm which had just finished bombarding her poor bottom.

"Please forgive me, dad, and thank you for spanking me," she said, loud enough for everybody to hear.

"All right, dear, but don't irritate me again. Hand me my matches, please. Now go and join your friends. They've been standing there watching me spank you."

Janet walked toward the girls, nervously fixing her hair back in place. Her mother turned around and went back to her room, without saying a word at any time.

"I think that's dreadful," volunteered Hester at once, the minute they were out on the porch, "beating your flesh as though it were a dead piece of meat."

"Spare your sympathies, Hester," said Betty, coldly. "I told her not to mess around with that radio while her father is reading."

"Oh, you're a brute too!" exclaimed Hester. "How can you help becoming indignant at such treatment!"

Janet caught Betty's line at once.

"Don't get excited, Hes. I'm not, at least not in my head anyway." She smiled at her own joke, and Betty joined her. "My poor bottom is still plenty hot though, if that's the same thing as being excited. But Bet's right, I shouldn't have taken that chance. So I did and got paid out, and that's that."

"But why torture a helpless girl for such a trifle? Suppose it did make a loud noise, and suppose it did disturb His Majesty, your father, for a half second, wouldn't a reprimand have been the more decent thing?"

"Our families don't know what that word means. But we can't complain, can we, Bet?"

"I should say not. Our parents know their stuff. If we're ever as competent as they are, we'll have good reason to be proud."

"That suits you, then, does it, being flogged half to death for every breath you take without their permission? Excuse me, please. I can't see how nice girls like you can be so dumb," finished Hester in a mood of extreme exasperation.

"Aw, why don't you change that record, Hes?" said Janet. "Can't

you see we're happy? We like our homes, we like our parents, we like each other, we want to like you, too. Whatever you think about whippings in general, we need them, and no foolin'. My dad had it right when he compared me one day to a filly while talking to Aunt Caroline, and that goes for all of us girls. We're young, lively, full of fun, and having a parental curb and bit between our teeth does us a world of good. And as for the whippings themselves, just forget that melodrama stuff about being flogged half to death. As a matter of real fact, confidentially between us, we feel strangely attracted to the whole process, as painful as it really is, and I think we'd yearn for these whippings if we didn't get them as often as we do. So there!"

While she talked her hands incessantly rubbed her spanked bottom and thighs, and now she turned to Betty: "Hey, do you know I'm still awful sore down there?"

Before Betty had a chance to answer, Hilda was upon them.

"Madam said you are to set the table, Miss Janet. She wants me upstairs."

"Did you hear the spanking, Hilda?" asked Betty.

"Yes, Miss Betty. The minute I heard the radio turned on I knew she'd get it."

"How about getting me some ice cubes, Hilda, my bottom's still hot."

"Miss Janet wants to get you murdered," said Betty.

"Yeh, Miss Betty, worse than that," the maid giggled. "Madam would just kick me out, that's all, and goodbye job."

"Does that scare you?" asked Hester, eager for the answer.

"Sure. I like everybody here, Miss Hester. I have to go now. Madam expects me right away."

She rushed in and the three girls walked toward the kitchen. They all helped to set the table under Janet's supervision. Presently they heard her mother's voice calling down requesting them to wash and dress for dinner. As they started to go up, Uncle Fred called his daughter.

"Come here, dear." He put his arm affectionately around her neck and showed her the newspaper. "Remember the frame you gave me for your picture on my desk? Well, here's the identical thing at Bradley's. Look at the price."

"Oh, that's a terrible gyp, dad! You owe me a dollar now."

"All right. Send me statements." They both laughed heartily. He shoved her gently toward her friends and they continued upstairs. This incident, in Hester's eyes, seemed to crown all her previous defeats in deduction. It was just too much for her feeble intelligence she admitted.

After dinner they sat around in the living-room, this time listening by

consent to Sunday evening programmes on the radio. Hilda had finished early with her tasks in the kitchen, thanks to the combined assistance of the three girls. It was usual for Janet to help her by drying the dishes, anyway, unless the family was going out, or she had more than ordinary homework for school. The maid came in after a while bringing a bowl of fruit. Her mistress spoke to her.

"Now that you're finished, Hilda, you may come and sit beside me here, and rest."

"Thank you, madam. May I darn your stockings while listening to the music?"

Her mistress nodded assent, the maid went out and returned in a minute with several pair of stockings and a sewing kit. Hester stole glances at the big maid-servant, taller and heavier than the woman she was sitting beside, who, petting the girl now, had only that morning violently thrashed her bare submissive bottom with the wickedest whip imaginable. But there they all were, the very picture of a happy, congenial, peaceful family. Darn it! Why were there so many baffling problems in the world?



THEY were on their way to bed when the phone rang. It was Eleanor on the long distance and she was reporting that they were coming back in the morning, and that the most blissful honeymoon a couple ever had was being tragically halted by sordid, disgusting, business demands. Anyway, would they meet them at the station at 11:45 a.m..

Janet and her mother, and the two girls and their small baggage, drove to the station by taxi. They couldn't use the car because Uncle Fred had to have it that morning to take a customer out. When the Lacy's came along there was the wildest excitement, kissing, talking, laughing so that sentences had no relation to each other at all. Uncle Arthur, with five noisy women on his hands, took them to a nearby restaurant for lunch. He was genuinely distressed to leave them, but he had to rush to an important appointment at the office. All the women left by taxi for the new home of the Lacy's where faithful Jennie had been industriously cleaning up in anticipation of their coming.

They all dissolved in admiration—and that included Eleanor, no less—at the comforts, conveniences and appointments of the new home. Everybody was proud of Arthur for his brilliant management in

having the whole house fitted to the last detail in their absence. Jennie had prepared a beautiful shortcake in their honour which she served with iced tea. Eleanor, after rattling off what she asserted was a fragmentary report of their honeymoon, demanded a full account from Louise of her stewardship. Were the girls any trouble, she wanted to know. Whereupon Aunt Louise, to Hester's overwhelming confusion before her brand new stepmother, related the four whippings that had been administered to her very own charges, Janet and Hilda. Throughout the recital Betty and Janet wore poker faces, while Hester stared intently at the pattern of her dress around her lap. She sat on her hands to conceal her nervousness, but she couldn't conceal the scarlet tinge in her face and neck. It couldn't have been more embarrassing if Aunt Louise had been describing her in the role of Janet or Hilda! Every now and then she stole a glance to see if her stepmother was looking at her, and she had the small comfort at least that Eleanor appeared to be looking at no one but her friend.

About four o'clock the Gilmores left and Eleanor and her two daughters went to their respective rooms to organise their things. The girls' bedroom was exquisite, with Hester as enthusiastic about it as Betty. But whether the latter did it on purpose or accidentally, she was confused and disquieted when she saw Betty calmly pick out of a trunk two canvas belts, a black leather strap, and a martinet, the latter being a whip consisting of a short wooden handle with nine narrow leather strips attached to it. These things, together with a long wooden ruler, Betty quietly placed in an orderly fashion in the top drawer of her dresser. She said not a word about them and Hester pretended not to notice those disagreeable portents of the days to come.

The rest of the day and Tuesday were busily spent with the remaining details of their new home. Eleanor talked to her friends Louise and Caroline several times each day, compelled to promise both an early date with Arthur for dinner. Then Wednesday morning, about an hour after her father had left for the office, Betty yielded to an impulse, while her mother was putting around their back yard, to phone Alice Kent and invite her to meet with them in the afternoon when they were going to shop at Bradley's. Alice eagerly consented because she heard her mother say she was going to spend the afternoon with her grandmother.

A few minutes later the phone rang and Jennie answered it. She went out to the back porch and told her mistress that Mrs. Kent was on the wire. She had just learned that her daughter had made a date to meet Betty at Bradley's this afternoon. Alice hadn't bothered asking permis-

sion because she had planned to go to her mother's, and she was angry; what did Eleanor know about the circumstances of this invitation? Nothing at all, she answered. Betty hadn't asked her permission either. During this conversation Betty stood by, an eager listener, but a worried look on her face and a sense of trouble brewing. She turned to Hester, making grimaces and motions as though she would like to interrupt but didn't dare. The next words of her mother sealed her doom.

"By all means whip her, Caroline. I'm going to tan my little girl's bottom, too. Of all the nerve! What about this afternoon? Oh, I'd let them meet later. Why not send Alice down? She won't have anything to do otherwise, and they're always so happy to be together. We'll just whip them for not seeking permission from their parents, but I wouldn't spoil their pleasure this afternoon." Then some irrelevant talk and she hung up the phone.

"Mother!" Betty quickly appealed, but she didn't get beyond that word.

"Quiet, please! Come in here." They went into the dining room and Eleanor sat down. Hester followed along knowing not why she went, but unable to hold back. She remained standing with her back to the wall, while Aunt Eleanor motioned Betty to come sit on her lap.

"You heard the conversation?" she said, pulling her back on her thighs.

"Yes, mother."

"You didn't ask my permission to invite Alice."

"But, mother, I didn't get a chance. Aunt Caroline phoned while you were still in the back yard."

"Then you knew where I was. You could have come out and asked me first."

"But I intended to when you came in, and then if you said no, I would have called Alice back."

"You are quibbling, Betty."

"I don't mean to quibble, I'm . . ."

"Instead of just saying 'Yes, mother,' you are beginning to argue also, it seems to me, and you know what that costs, don't you?"

"Oh no, mother, please. I don't wish to argue. It was wrong of me to call Alice the way I did," Betty said, quickly apologising and backing down.

Eleanor turned her face to Hester. "I suppose you know by this time how I punish your sister"—this designation had been officially established the day she returned from her honeymoon—"when she does

something to displease me?"

"Yes, Aunt Eleanor," Hester whispered, unable to evade the question although her throat dried from the effort.

"What does mother do to you when you are disobedient?" she asked Betty.

"You whip me, mother."

"Indeed I do. Will you please go upstairs now and make yourself ready. Hester, I want you to go along with your sister and watch her being punished. It will add to her shame, I hope, to know you are looking on."

"But, Aunt Eleanor!" She broke off, the rest sticking on her tongue. She had the feeling that now or never she must take her stand. To yield was to condone, to approve, and that would be . . . awful! Today she would be only looking on, tomorrow the tables might . . . ! But her inner struggle was cut short.

"Hester, I asked you to go along. Please follow Betty upstairs." She rose and turned in the direction of the kitchen. There was such a quiet air of finality in her voice, such a look in her eyes as she fixed them on Hester's, that the latter quaked, feeling her knees giving way. The physical strength with which to face this issue was lacking, and she was suddenly keenly aware of her inequality in a struggle with this extraordinary woman. Betty, chastened and obedient, was already near the top of the stairs, Aunt Eleanor had already gone back to the yard. She walked toward the staircase and began slowly lifting one leg after the other.

Betty was pulling her dress off when Hester entered. There was a great contrast in the colour of their faces, Hester's being white, while Betty's was suffused with red. Neither uttered a word. The one to be whipped, however, was busy. Walking around in only her girdle and slippers, having first removed her shoes and stockings, she opened her dresser drawer, brought out the long strap and put it on her bed. From the top of the dresser she brought over the cosmetic jar, the box of dusting powder and large puff, these she put on the little table between her bed and Hester's. Then she went into the bathroom. While she was gone Hester tried to find a place for herself. She was ready to cry from indecision, not knowing whether to sit down, lie down, or stand up, or what. In a couple of minutes Betty came from the bathroom, went to her bed and lay down on the coverlet. She turned to Hester.

"Sit down, Hes, and make yourself comfortable. I guess the show will begin pretty soon." She tried to be casual, better still, to affect humour in her remark, but it didn't come off too well, and she felt she didn't

convince her 'audience' with her nonchalance. As a matter of fact, she was quite worried about the dose she was going to get, mother not having made it clear whether she was going to be punished for arguing, too.

"Come on, Hes, sit down in that chair over there. Don't be frightened. I'm not. This is old stuff to me. It takes a few minutes and then it's over."

"Oh, Betty!" was all Hester could say, and she burst out crying. The exclamation had the tragic note of one come to witness her sister's physical torture, while torn with anguish by her own torment.

Betty sat up in bed.

"Stop crying, Hester. Stop it at once! For goodness sake don't let mother see you crying or you'll give yourself away. Stop it at once."

Hester didn't know what she meant by that remark but was too weak to ask. She was sufficiently impressed, however, by the mere warning not to take any chances, and she hastily dried her tears. Not a moment too soon, for the door opened and there stood the executioner.

Betty saw her mother pull over a chair and she knew at once what sort of whipping she was going to receive. In her training the requirements of preparation did not include putting a chair alongside the bed. Betty never liked that rule because it left her in doubt up to the last minute whether her mother was going to put the canvas belts on her wrists and ankles and whip her in bed, or whether she was going to take her across the lap. Her preference, of course, was the latter, for she felt a great comfort during the whipping in being held against her mother's body.

She got off the bed, and pulled the resilient satin rubberised girdle down to her calves, lifting out one leg at a time. Then she fixed herself in position, her bare bottom and thighs to the right of her mother, her upper body pressing against the right thigh at an angle to afford the widest sweep of the strap. Eleanor was a profoundly skilful tactician. More conscious than anyone of Hester's presence, she administered a carefully figured out dosage. The first dozen lashes were firmly applied but not severely, but after that the strap began cutting sharp swaths across the top of both bottom cheeks, then accurately directed at the base, finally at the upper thighs. During the operation the girl's bottom reared and arched, her mother paying no attention to the reflexes. Hester looked on at the scientific whipping with a hypnotic stare. Watching the incessant vibrations in the muscles which the strap visited with its burning kisses, she saw Betty's beautifully-shaped bottom and thighs change from ivory to pink, to red, to scarlet. Try as she

would to control her thoughts, she couldn't help making comparisons between Betty's and Janet's bottoms. The latter's, she thought, were more pear-shaped, Betty's more like a moon. She couldn't avoid making a choice, proud in a strange way that she preferred her own sister's bottom to Janet's. It seemed to her that when Betty's was in process of making contortions it twitched in so lively a manner that an observer could have been forgiven his reluctance to see it abate. She even recalled, by comparison, Aunt Louise's reference to Janet's 'hard-rubber' bottom, which was an exaggeration, of course, for Janet's also quivered like jelly while being whipped.

Presently it was over, and Betty was fixing her tender bottom on her mother's ample lap. Now began the question period, another ineradicable picture for Hester's mental gallery of exciting images.

"What did I whip you for, dear?" it began.

"For making a date with Alice without your permission."

"Then you were disobedient?"

"Yes, Mommy."

"Is there anything else I whipped you for?"

"Yes, Mommy, for . . . for quibbling."

"Do you think I punished you unjustly?"

Betty put her arms around her mother's neck, while her tired little head sank down on the maternal breast.

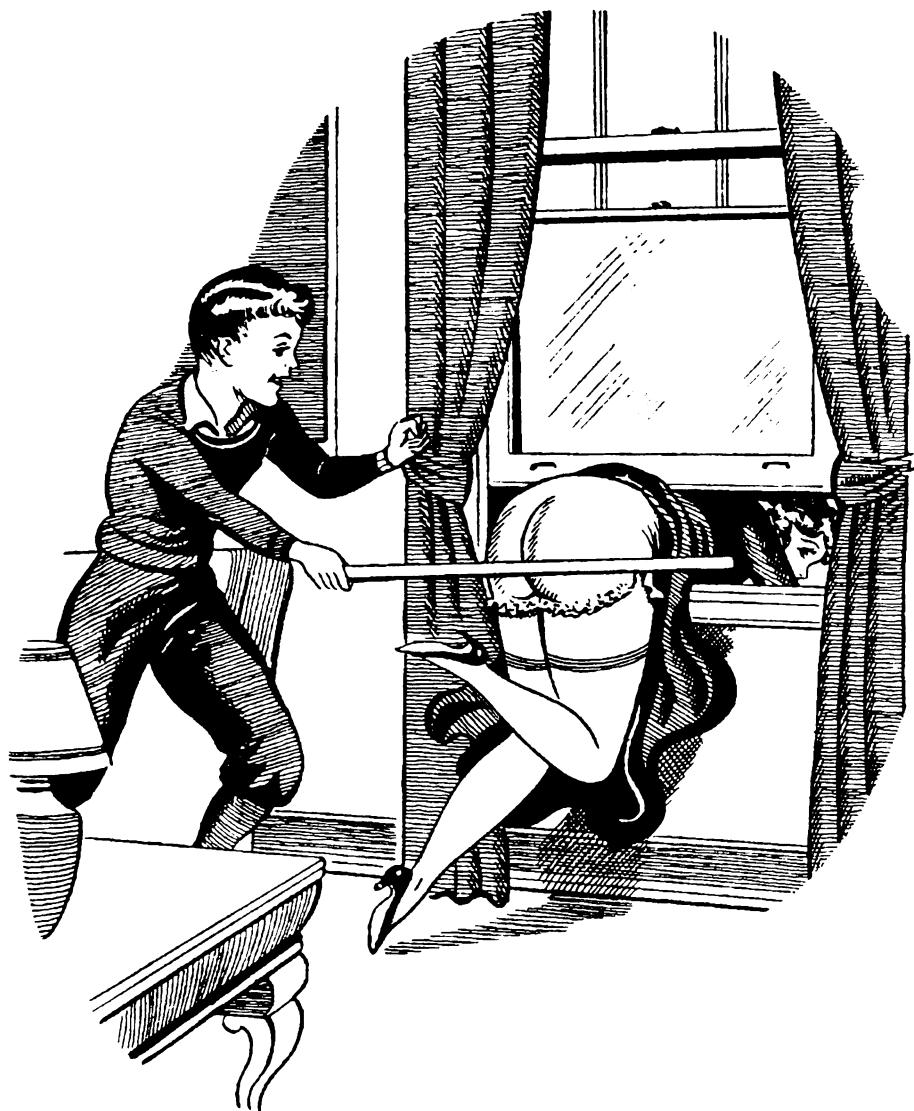
"No, Mommy, I deserved it. Thank you for whipping me." In measured succession followed the rest of the formula already described. Hester saw her sister kiss the frequently-used strap and then the face of this amazing woman, who had plumbbed the secret of extracting genuine gratitude in exchange for terrifying physical pain.

"Now rest a while, dear. This afternoon we'll all go downtown to Bradley's and you can see Alice. Hester, help your sister if she wants anything." Without another word she left the room.

Betty, back in bed, stretched out at full length face down, permitting Hester a front seat view of her deeply-reddened bottom. For a little while not a word, then:

"Hes, darling, will you rub in some cold cream gently and dust a little powder on the hot spots?"

She jumped to aid the girl she was so fond of, despite the fact that she dimly sensed this last request as another link in the chain that was being slowly forged for her. She had never touched a flagellated bottom in her life, and as her fingers slid over the heated flesh that formed this exquisitely round and firm posterior, she felt a queer sensation of pleasure which she attributed to the knowledge that she was bringing



*He sent about ten solid whacks across his sister's large
and heavily cushioned bottom*

relief to her dear friend. This time she didn't remonstrate, pity, or scornfully condemn, realising at last the utter futility of trying to argue with these girls about the subject of whipping.

Together they came downstairs after she had eagerly waited for the opportunity to help Betty get dressed. Before long Jennie served the lunch which mother and daughters ate, for two of them at least as though nothing unusual had happened. Betty, of course, set the free and easy mood by her genial chatter. About 1:30 they started for Bradley's where they had some linens to exchange and toilet accessories to buy.

In the general waiting room they found Alice who jumped up to greet the girls. With a brief hello to her Aunt Eleanor she placed herself between Hester and Betty and took their arms. But she didn't try to evade the natural question.

"I hope your mother whipped you this morning, Alice, as I suggested."

"Yes, Aunt Eleanor, she did." These girls weren't so used to this sort of talk that they could avoid blushing. Not only Alice's face was red but Betty's too. Hester was the most uncomfortable of all.

"I'm glad to hear it," said Aunt Eleanor with evident satisfaction. "Your friend Betty also got paid out for making dates without permission. Don't try that again, children."

"We won't, Aunt Eleanor."

"What about Josephine and Tony, have they been good lately?"

"Jo had bad luck this week, Aunt Eleanor, on account of some boy friends. Only last night she paid her second bill in six days. Tony got a hard licking from dad Sunday afternoon. And today's is my third this week. It was the easiest, though, in several weeks. I also got one from dad Sunday, he was in a bad mood after Tony, and he gave me a pretty severe whipping."

This was the real, uninhibited Alice, unhesitatingly talking to her intimates about the corporal punishments imposed on her sister, her brother and herself. Asked further by Aunt Eleanor—obviously for Hester's information, and probably another reason why she wanted this date uninterfered with—what the causes for these punishments were, Alice rattled them off one by one. There was a time, not further back than a week, when Hester would have jumped out of her skin upon hearing the trivial reasons for which these poor children were being 'flogged half to death', but now she listened to Alice with no enmity in her heart for her 'aunts'. She was not conscious of a positive emotion of either anger or resignation, she just listened. And that was

a bad or hopeful sign, depending upon one's viewpoint.

When Eleanor completed her exchange and shopping transactions she told the girls she was going to run down to her husband's office, that they could do as they liked for the rest of the afternoon, but that she wanted them back home by six o'clock. Betty immediately asked if Alice could come for dinner, and her mother said she would be happy to have her if she got her mother's permission. Alice leaped at the invitation and said she would try to reach her mother by phone at once.

Walking along the streets together, Hester caught herself again and again looking at the posterior rotundities of her two companions. The instant she became aware of what she was doing her eyes turned away, a feeling of guilt suffusing her as though she had been caught stealing. Nevertheless, her mind intermittently returned to the image of those shapely rear muscles bouncing around nervously under the impulsion of stinging heat waves generated by a single or multiple leather thong. Was it only her knowledge, or the genuine result of those frequent experiences, that seemed to give such distinguishing mobility to their full rounded hips? Whichever it was, she began reluctantly admitting to herself that contours such as these, and the graceful motions of the muscles that lay beneath, added distinctive aesthetic value to a young girl's figure. As the girls window-shopped on the avenue she sought to get between them, that she might find a natural excuse for letting her hands glide softly over their hips. It gratified her to believe that they were unaware of her gentle palpitations.

The more she observed Alice the more she was taken by the girl's natural charm and utter lack of guile. Next to Betty, thought Hester, she was the most sweetly ingenuous girl alive. It was almost an irresistible pleasure to hear her tell of the whippings she received, or Jo or Tony, and with such a disarming frankness that one could have imagined the disciplinary practices at the Kents were common to every household on earth. She was careful to differentiate, however, between the pleasure of hearing Alice tell about the rigorous discipline at home and the *principle* of corporal punishment, stoutly denying the validity of such an anachronistic principle in the modern world. But this was the crude mechanism of her defence, the fact was she had unwittingly moved a long way, learning more in three weeks of the hidden springs in man's nature than in eighteen young years.

Everybody was happy when Aunt Caroline, easily reached by phone at her mother's, gave her consent to Alice going to the Lacs for dinner. She made but one condition, that she leave promptly at 9:30, since no one could call for her. After dinner, the family spread around the

restful and tastefully furnished living-room, were regaled by further incidents from the lives of the Kents. Arthur displayed the liveliest interest of all, naturally, indebted to his competent wife for the skillful management of the conversation. Hester enjoyed it least of all, for the very good reason that her father was present. It was the first time that open discussion of the subject—in a general way, to be sure—took place with her father part of the company. She was at a loss how to manifest her displeasure, a gesture important for her sense of dignity, without impairing her relations with Alice which she was, on the contrary, anxious to cultivate. Presently she found a way of subtly communicating to her father, and her aunt, her lack of interest in the topic at hand by quietly leaving the room and returning a number of times. Somehow, it provoked her that no one paid much attention to her coming or going. Here again the wisdom of Eleanor was at its best, for out of the corner of her eye she never relaxed her observation of Hester's least gesture, letting that innocent young lady cherish her illusions—yet awhile.

On the dot of 9:30 obedient young Alice kissed her hosts good bye and started for home.



THE next two days were without incident, but Saturday morning Betty earned herself another whipping. She had followed her Uncle Arthur down while he took the car out of their garage, and then stayed on tinkering with a tool kit. Her mother, helping Jennie in the kitchen, could see her through the screen door and called down to ask what she was doing. Just putting around, she answered. Her mother suggested that she come in, warning her not to get her clothes soiled, anyway. Hester heard all this from the pantry where she had chosen a low stool on which to whiten her buckskin shoes.

Several minutes later Betty came up the stairs of the back porch, her cheek smeared with grease and an oil spot on one of her tan oxfords. Her mother was quietly angry.

"For this you're going to get whipped right here in the kitchen, young lady. I shan't even take the time or trouble to go upstairs after you. Come over here!" Picking up a towel she held an edge under the hot water spigot, put her arm quickly around Betty's neck, and vigorously rubbed her soiled cheek with the dampened cloth. Hester watched her

sister being treated as though she were five instead of fifteen years old. Eleanor's next words were to Hester. "Fetch me that stool, please." She brought it back, not knowing what her aunt wanted with it. But in another second she saw her press her left foot on the stool's seat, jerk Betty forward and over her raised left thigh, and pull her dress back and her girdle down All this was accomplished in the best duplication of Uncle Fred Gilmore's well known technique, in other words, almost in the twinkling of an eye. Turning again to Hester, she dumbfounded that poor girl with her next request.

"Run upstairs, dear, quickly, and get me Betty's martinet. You know where she keeps it."

Hester blushed furiously. "But Aunt Eleanor, I . . . you . . . I." The protest stuck in her throat. And who should come to her aid in the frightful emergency but the little Spartan whose courage never deserted her, though her bottom was already fixed for 'frying'. Long afterward, Hester never could recall that stout heart without filling up with a sense of sisterly pride.

"Please, Hes, do what mother asks. Get it for me," came Betty's voice from out the crook of Eleanor's arm. Hester was sure the voice trembled.

"But Betty . . . !" she demurred.

"Please, Hes, the longer you take the worse for me," came that voice again.

This time, her heart heavy with the consequences of her act and a devastating premonition of an early crisis in her life, she turned toward the stairs on her fateful errand. Holding the martinet in her hand as she descended, she had the feeling that it wouldn't be long now before . . . but she couldn't complete the thought, a bitter taste was in her mouth.

Other than the fact that the position Betty was obliged to take this time seemed supremely humiliating for such a big girl, and doubtless enhanced the pain by reason of the stretched surfaces, there was nothing exceptional about the whipping. Her mother applied stroke after stroke with faultless precision and a keen sense of where and how they hurt most. Jennie stopped work to watch an old spectacle, and Hester's nails cut against the palms of her clenched fists from excitement. The culprit herself groaned quietly, offering better testimony of the acuteness of her pain by the ceaseless convulsions of her blazing posterior than by the tone or volume of her cries.

On this occasion she wasn't allowed to rest after suing for and obtaining pardon, her mother having changed her mind about resuming her

interrupted task. Instead, she announced she was going to take her up to the bathroom and give her a good scrubbing herself, after all the grime she had accumulated in the garage. Taking her by the hand she led the way up the stairs, providing Hester with yet another picture of a mortifying *rôle* submissively accepted by a great big girl, virtually a young lady.

When Betty returned, nearly an hour later, after resting and changing her clothes, she looked fresh and cool, and dainty and luscious enough to eat. The rest of the day was uneventful, except that Aunt Eleanor carefully contrived to report to her husband Betty's offence and the manner in which she was punished, under circumstances that made it impossible for Hester to retire while she spoke. They were all in Eleanor's bedroom, and she had placed Hester on the stool in front of her dressing table. She said she had some ideas about fixing her step-daughter's hair, and stood back of her gently combing the strands out before rearranging. Arthur was sorting neckties, and it was in this setting that she timed her report. Hester had no escape, being obliged to listen while her father learned how she had aided in Betty's whipping. She had the feeling that no humiliation she could ever suffer would surpass this.

In the evening Aunt Caroline phoned and they accepted an invitation to come over the next day in the late afternoon. The conversation was held up by Alice persuading her mother to let her invite Hester and Betty to come before noon, and by Betty persuading her parents to let them accept.

The girls arrived at the Kents at about eleven. It being Sunday morning Uncle Hilary was just finishing his breakfast after a leisurely bath. In the next five short hours, before their parents arrived, they were to listen to whipping concerts and solo performances good enough to suit the most exacting virtuoso. As a matter of fact, they hadn't got farther than removing their hats than they noticed a fugitive cloud across Josephine's eyes, and a vaguely depressed tone in what was intended to be a cheery greeting. Alice and Jo took the two girls up to their bedroom, and Alice immediately apologised for Jo's abstracted appearance, explaining as easily as one would a headache that Jo was going to be whipped before lunch. It seemed that she had asked to pay off her accumulated charges last night, but her mother had decreed Sunday before lunch as the time, and in the presence of their expected young guests. Mrs. Kent justified it, Alice explained, on the ground that Jo hadn't been whipped before company in so long that it was high time to make up for that neglect. It appeared, further, that Jo had piled up

in two and one-half days something like 260 marks. Which meant that each one had to be tolled off with a sharp stripe from a leather band across her twitching posterior until the last mark was paid.

Shortly after Jo had sadly confirmed her sister's explanations, and the conversation had turned to school topics, they all heard, coming from the foot of the stairs, the voice of Aunt Caroline.

"Josephine, where are you?"

"In the bedroom, mother, with the girls," she called back, while Alice nodded knowingly.

"All right. Stay there with them. I'm coming up in a minute to whip you. Hurry and get undressed."

Josephine made a wry face but wasted no time pulling her dress off, the rest of her things following in rapid succession until she was nude. She had a beautiful body, hard little breasts, smooth skin dull pink in tone, rather narrow waist line and broad pelvis. Around and over the latter lay firm cushions of muscles that composed her hips and bottom over which Hester saw a wide sprinkling of spots and dots, like those on the bottom of Aunt Louise's maid, Hilda. Whippings were certainly no novelty to Josephine because as the oldest of all these girls her experience with the leather strap dated back a good long fourteen years.

When her mother came in and found her obedient daughter lying face down over the bed, she instructed her to retain that position, asked Alice to bring their strap which the latter removed from a hook on the wall, and immediately paid Josephine out with 260 sharply-delivered lashes for the 260 marks she had charged up since the last whipping, not three days ago. Only an old and continuous experience could have produced the fortitude which Josephine exhibited under the impact of these arm-length, briskly-delivered, lashes from the heavy but narrow leather strap. Nevertheless, the girl writhed quietly on her bed of pain, her legs working convulsively back and forth throughout the whipping.

The punishment was over in several minutes, thanks to the whipping expressed, pardon granted, diary produced by Jo and marked "Paid" by her mother in another minute or two, and Aunt Caroline was on her way back downstairs. Alice rubbed and powdered Jo down expertly, the latter dressed promptly, and then all the girls started for the front porch.

Everybody took chairs except Jo who said she preferred to stand awhile. Betty remarked that whenever she saw her get whipped she always envied her presence of mind and the control she developed over her posterior muscles in keeping them relaxed during punishment. She had tried it lots of times, appreciating the difference in effect between

contact with the strap on tense muscles and on those relaxed, but never succeeded in controlling them. Jo's sense of humour asserted itself despite the unpleasantness she still felt in her seat. She cupped her chin in the palm of her hand, made a face as though to look old, and said:

"Ah, my dear children, when you get as old as I am, and have my years of experience, you will know how to do many things." Even Hester couldn't refrain from laughing at the comical face she made. Betty called out above the laughter that by the time she mastered the technique she would be married and wouldn't need the experience. "Are you forgetting, my little pet, that there are husbands who can be as stern as some mammas and papas we know?" asked Jo, looking off toward the heavens. Alice wondered what time lunch would be served and said she was going to find out.

She turned toward the living-room when she got past the door, being attracted by Tony who was banging a yardstick against his shoe with one hand while turning the pages of a big book with the other.

"What are you reading, Professor?" she asked, coming toward him. She looked at the book, saw it was Malinowski's "Sexual Life of Savages," and tore it out of his hand. "What's an infant like you doing with a book like that?" and she stood on her toes trying to reach an upper section in the book shelves where she could put it away. An altercation immediately ensued, passing rapidly to a physical contest, and ending by Tony getting Alice's head and shoulders through an open window and pulling the sash down.Flushed with victory and heedless of the consequences, he looked around for some weapon and spied the yardstick. He threw back the skirt of his helpless adversary, took up a stance, and let go with all his might against Alice's perfectly poised bottom. He had the pleasure of seeing her kick frantically, but could not hear what noises she emitted. He felt rather safe about that anyway, because the living room windows faced on the far side of the house from the porch. But after sending about ten solid whacks across his sister's large and heavily cushioned bottom, the yardstick broke in two, and it was only at that moment he realised what he had let himself in for. Well, maybe it was worth it; but he quit anyhow, and released his victim.

Whatever notions she had of revenge were squelched instantly by the familiar sound of her mother's steps. She entered the living-room just as Alice had given the last tug to her disarrayed clothes.

"Come on, children, time to eat," she said. "I called you a minute ago, didn't you hear me?" Suddenly, her practised eye took in all the tell-tale remains of the struggle she missed—the sofa cushions pulled

around, strands of Alice's hair out of place, Tony's excited appearance, and most of all, the broken yardstick. In a few minutes she had both versions, from accused and accuser, the protagonists of this little domestic comedy playing both roles alternately. The judge's verdict was a foregone conclusion, which didn't surprise the actors at all. But the food was already on the table, so execution of sentence was postponed until after the coffee and dessert course.

Uncle Hilary, the young guests and Jo heard the full story from Aunt Caroline at the table. Alice fidgeted in her chair, her seat still tingling from the wallops of her strong-arm brother.

"Why are you squirming over there?" her father asked, unfeelingly.

"He hurt me something awful, dad, with that yardstick," answered Alice, tears still in her eyes.

"I can just imagine how upset you are, at the pain and indignity of it all never having felt anything but your knickers against your delicate bottom," contributed her mother with this cutting jest. "Sit up, and stop making those grimaces. They won't diminish your punishment, or Anthony's either. Breaking a yardstick on her tough bottom is about as difficult as bending a pin against a brick." This informative comparison was directed at Hester and Betty, as though they were viewing this scene objectively. From them she turned toward her husband.

"Do you want to whip Alice when we're through eating, or shall I?"

"It doesn't matter to me, Caroline. Whatever you say."

"I've already worn my arm out on Josephine this morning and I intended writing a few letters before the Lacs came. Now these mischief makers have to go and mix everything up, of course. But then you have Anthony to punish, anyway." She looked quite perplexed.

"Oh, don't worry about me, dear. I've handled two of them in a row before, and I think they'll admit they never got cheated."

"All right, Hilary. Take them both."

If Arthur Lacy could have been there during this cool discussion of a burning subject, he could have traced his mind back to his early conversations with Eleanor, and recalled her sapient prediction that Hester would inevitably be caught between the cross fires of the perennial subject—whippings, and would ultimately learn to tolerate it after the manner of her companions. To be sure, such discussions never failed to move them profoundly, but they had long lost the power to annihilate, as they still did Hester. She, poor soul, was again in a bath of emotional perspiration as she heard the cold plans these heartless parents were laying for 'flogging' their naturally behaving offspring.

The coffee and dessert were finished and Uncle Hilary lit a cigarette.

Everybody waited ill at ease until he finished, only Aunt Caroline and he appearing unconcerned. The children all tried to find different occupations for their nervous hands. Finally, Uncle Hilary extinguished his cigarette.

"Now let's see, who shall I whip first? All right, Alice, come over to this tabaret. I'll finish you off so you can return to your friends. Josephine, run upstairs and get the riding-whip and martinet."

Both girls did as they were ordered. Jo came right back with both instruments and handed them to her father. He laid the martinet to one side and put his fist around the handle of the brown plaited, tightly wound and thin, tapering riding-whip. He ordered Alice to lay her breast over the tabaret top, then told Jo to come around and pull Alice's girdle off. The latter reached in under her younger sister's dress and began peeling off a white satin rubberised pantie girdle. Meanwhile, her father pulled the skirt back on her shoulders, and as the rubber-treated girdle of heavy and strongly compressing material came down, it released a pair of bottom cheeks rounder and fuller looking than any Hester had seen, always excepting Hilda's, of course. It was a big surprise for Hester to see such a bulky posterior for, clothed, Alice seemed but a trifle wider across the hips than the rest of the girls.

Jo was now ordered to come around the front and hold her sister's hands while she was being whipped. In order to get a firm grip on Alice's wrists she had to get on her knees, in which position she remained throughout the whipping. This, by the way, was no ill service she was doing her sister, for both knew by experience the comparative comfort to be realised, while being whipped, from a firm grip on something; whereas being insecurely held only prolonged the whipping and made possible an inadvertent lash against an inexpressibly tender region.

The riding-whip carne down quickly for its introductory kiss and brought a violent quiver in Alice's hinder parts. Incidentally, she hadn't lied about her brother's strength with the yardstick, for her bottom had four purple streaks a little more than the exact width of the yardstick, due to the fact that the colour of the bruises had spread. As the riding-whip went back and forth across that wide field, the young guests were able to observe Alice's experienced behaviour under punishment. Not a cry passed her lips while that powerful leather duster visited every inch of her bottom and thighs. She did breathe hard, however, with every contact, while her face was flushed and perspiring and her muscles winced in time to the rhythmic beat of the whip.

Nevertheless, her bottom vibrated only mildly, the constantly changing colour drawing the greatest attention. Obviously, she couldn't control the colour patterns, but it was evident she was learning to relax the full fleshed area which almost daily got a powerful churning from her mother or father.

With Alice polished off, Uncle Hilary turned to his son and heir, whom he invited to come spread himself across his lap. The room had its comic aspect for the moment, for while the lad was pulling his pants off, the lass was trying to pull hers on. It was no easy task for Alice, trying to get that heavy rubber pantie girdle past her swollen and tender thighs and hips; indeed, it marked a sort of refinement of her punishment each time, in compelling her to irritate with her own little hands the hot and puffy area just soundly whipped. And not only was it a painful task to pull the powerfully resisting fabric over that large surface, but it was a considerable discomfort to have the tender flesh compressed at a time when it begged for air and freedom.

Once over his father's lap Tony turned his face away from his audience, and never turned it back once. If he couldn't control his agitated bottom against the stinging impressions of the martinet, at least he managed to hide his shamed face for the little while. His father began the operation of inflicting the kind of scorching pain the martinet was capable of by pulling his drawers away from the region he wished to reach. After five or six years of continuous familiarity with many types of instruments, Tony could hardly be overwhelmed by the facts and implications of his present whipping. His lively bottom, almost as nicely curved as the average girl's of his age, shrank back constantly from the descent of the thongs and then actually came forward to meet them, while his voice gave forth a steady stream of exclamations. Never to ask for pardon —no, not yet—but only to report on the effect of the whip's hot kisses. "Ooooh, that burns! Wow, that stings! Please, not so hard, daddd!"—and so on from the first lash to the last. Just the same, it was only little more than half as severe a whipping as his sister Alice received, yet there was ten times the excitement.

He was allowed to go to bed and rest while his veteran sisters went for a walk down the street with their friends. They returned in time to greet Uncle Arthur and his wife who arrived shortly before five o'clock. Tony was already downstairs, but slower to forget and slower to recover from the discomforts of a whipping, he was the least communicative of all assembled in the living-room. The inconvenience of being present while Uncle Arthur and Aunt Eleanor were told about the three whippings they missed, was as much an extension of his punishment,

as pulling the pantie girdle back into place was for Alice; conversation about it, on the contrary, being as natural to her as the subject of clothes.

Walking into the dining-room later to take their seats, Hilary put his arm around Arthur's shoulder, saying in a gruff but singularly pleasant voice: "Ought to have you over some Sunday when we're tanning our kids' bottoms. Our families, you know, have a law that's scrupulously observed: no secrets from our intimate friends. How about it?"

"I'd be delighted to come, Hilary. Why didn't you phone this morning, we might have been over earlier. But just say when."

"All right. Say, Caroline," they were all at their places now, "did you hear me tell Arthur we must have him over some Sunday when we whip the children?"

"Of course, Arthur. Let's make it for next Sunday. I'll put Josephine's settlement over a day or so, and Alice and Anthony will be served then also, instead of the last day they earned it."

"But I promised Louise we would be over," demurred Eleanor.

"So what? I'll call her up and invite them too. We'll have a meeting of the complete clan, including Janet and Hilda. I'll ask her to lend me the Swede to help with the dinner."

During these colloquies, and those preceding, Hester never noticed how consistently her name was omitted, how she was spared directly embarrassing questions—if never any situations—or she could have seen how this consideration fell to her by design, and not by accident. After dinner the company divided into natural groups, Hilary and Arthur becoming involved in a discussion on international questions of war and peace, with Tony an interested listener; Eleanor and Caroline on domestic problems, and the girls all talking at once on subjects of no importance whatever. Jo was called away twice by the telephone, in each case an eager young man attempting to inveigle a date out of her. She had to explain, patiently, that they were having company and she could under no circumstances go out, no, not even for an hour. After each conversation she dutifully reported to her mother the name of the boy she talked with, what he wanted, and what she said. A kiss each time was her proof that mother was content. At about eleven o'clock the party broke up and the Lacy's started for home.

The next few weeks passed by rapidly, with Hester imperceptibly accommodating her mind to the realities of corporal punishment as the chief disciplinary medium in well brought up families. Not for her, of course, she wasn't the type that required it, but there were obviously boys and girls of excellent character who really needed that stinging

hot medicine. They grew up with it, and it seemed just as essential to their development as milk and vegetables. If some day she had children of her own, well, she would give serious consideration to the method, at any rate.

During these weeks she had watched Betty being whipped six or eight times, and the Sunday following that visit to the Kents they had returned, and in company with the Gilmore family, witnessed Jo, Alice and Tony whipped once more. Her mind couldn't resist making comparisons between their previous behaviour under punishment, between themselves, and between Betty, Janet and Hilda. Then one Saturday morning, while Arthur was home for the day, a great event took place of historic importance.

Arthur was in the bathroom at the time cleaning his military brushes, and his wife was hanging dresses up in the front bedroom. The girls were out on the lawn fixing the hose to sprinkle the grass and brick walk, which ran from the garage alongside the house to the front curb. Jennie was working in the basement from where she could hear and generally see what the girls were doing. After the water was turned on Hester and Betty both raced for the nozzle, the latter getting to it first. Waving the water spray from side to side she threatened Hester with it playfully. She dexterously evaded the aim, finally, by running toward the porch. With another playful threat Betty made as if to turn the hose on her there by skimming the front steps with the spray. The aim was less than perfect, for while Hester escaped the edge of one of the porch rugs didn't, getting soaked through and through. A stifled little scream escaped from Hester's mouth, causing Aunt Eleanor to raise the window and lean out. She saw Betty managing the hose.

"What happened?"

"Nothing, mother, we're just fooling."

"Better turn the hose off, then, if you want to fool around; before you do some damage." She closed the window and turned away.

Betty relinquished the hose to Hester, saying she could play with it now. At once she became Hester's target, uttering little screams as she ran back and forth. Finally, trying also to seek refuge on the porch, she ran up the steps, the spray following her, and this time dousing the rug from corner to corner. Sobered by the accident, they turned the hose off, rolled it back to its place, and began looking around for a dry spot where they could stretch the soaked rug out in the sun. Only the porch rail offered any suggestion, and there they hung it. Betty had a premonition that she would presently pay for this little fun.

Indeed, not fifteen minutes elapsed before the inquisition began. The

condition of the rug was discovered and Mrs. Lacy having with her own eyes seen who wielded the hose, drew the obvious conclusions. With Jennie standing in the doorway, listening; with Arthur as much absorbed in the trial as the defendant herself; with Hester staring blankly at the opposite wall, uttering not a word, poor Betty heard her mother condemn her to a sound whipping to be administered at once in the presence of her sister and father. She was ordered upstairs, and to lay out the martinet and ruler.

All of a sudden the voice of Jennie, the negro maid, startled them all. Begging pardon for the intrusion, she said she couldn't remain quiet and see her dear child Betty take the entire punishment when she was only partly to blame. The worst offender stood there, she said, pointing to Hester! Jennie had witnessed and heard it all. Having been warned by their mother, Hester, paying no heed at all after Betty had immediately relinquished the hose, began doing exactly the thing that would lead to these consequences. It was Hester, not Betty, who pointed the hose directly on the porch and soaked the rug in its entirety. Jennie's huge breast heaved from excitement as though she had just finished running a mile.

Eleanor rose courageously and magnificently to the occasion. The time had come at last. The gauntlet had been laid down, she must pick it up. She ordered Betty to halt and take a seat. Turning to her step-daughter she asked if she admitted Jennie's charges. Hester, red and white by turns, acknowledged they were partly true.

"What do you mean by partly?"

"I mean Betty also wet the rug."

"What you mean, I think, is pretty mean," observed her stepmother coldly. "Betty, you will notice, didn't turn on you when I told her I was going to punish her. She just started to walk quietly upstairs, saying not a word about you, who were just as much or more to blame. What have you to say to that, Hester?"

"Well, she's . . . she's used to being punished for all sorts of things. It's just another for her. I'm a . . . a different type." She burst out crying.

"Indeed you are. You try to throw the blame on her while she takes yours quietly and courageously. Whose character, would you say, is to be admired more? Come over here to me." This was said in a soft voice and in a manner that struck no fear. She came forward into her stepmother's arm which closed around her waist. "I am dearly in love with your father and I want to love his daughter as dearly as I love mine. You've got to help me, will you?" Her voice was most persuasive.

Hester shook her shoulders in assent, too ashamed to look up. Her

stepmother continued.

"I want to see your complexion fresh and clear, and your character big and noble, like Betty's; and to have you admired just as she is. Do you know why her character is even more beautiful than her face?" No answer. "You don't answer, but you really know why. It's because I've been whipping Betty several times a week since she was eight years old. You see what I've made of her, and what Aunt Louise accomplished with Janet, and Aunt Caroline with Alice and Josephine. There's still enough time to make a beautiful girl of you also and I intend to try very hard. We begin today, finally, this morning, right now! You richly deserve the whipping I was going to give Betty, and even a harder one because of your shameful behaviour. But I shall be generous and considerate. First of all, I forgive Betty and rescind the order I just issued out of gratification for her sportsmanship, courage and willingness to take the sole blame. Instead, I shall punish you but only slightly because it is the first time you are going to be whipped. Yes, whipped!—just the way Betty and the other girls are whipped, on your bare bottom, with a leather strap!"

Hester's entire frame shook violently from the emotion of this long anticipated, long dreaded climax. Her tear-drenched face looked blindly around her. "Dad!" she exclaimed, like a drowning person going down for the third time. She got an answer, though.

"Don't appeal to me, my child. I've been expecting, almost praying for this, and now I am happy that it has come. My wish is that my dear wife—your mother—should have absolute authority over you. I gave it to her sometime ago with my full blessing. I shall not interfere in whatever she does with you. Be courageous, obedient, and proud of such a mother as Betty has. Let's hope the time speedily comes when we have two wonderful Bettys in our happy home."

"Now look at me, dear," resumed her stepmother, pulling her face up and drying her tears. "If you carry out the order I am about to give you, promptly and to the last letter, I shall go easy with you this first time. If you cause me any trouble, I shall whip you until your bottom is so scorching hot you will not be able to sit down for two days. Now go upstairs to your bedroom, undress the way Betty does, lay out the flat black leather strap, the way she does, and stretch out on the bed and wait for me. I shall come up in a few minutes and whip you, alone this time, out of special consideration. Go!"

"Aunt Eleanor!" she exclaimed hoarsely.

"That's forbidden from now on. You will call me mother hereafter."

"But . . . mother!" she said, yielding and yet still expostulating.

"I ordered you upstairs, Hester, and you still stand here arguing. You either go at once and remain in my good graces, or you delay at risk of my displeasure and irritation. I warn you, my irritation may carry over for weeks and cause you the greatest unpleasantness. I shall absolutely exclude you from the slightest participation in our programmes, besides whipping you hard several times a day, if necessary. You can bring all this trouble on yourself, if you choose, by just one offence—arguing." She stopped talking, and no one else said a word. She was giving Hester time to study the implications of her promises. After more than a minute of silence, she spoke once more.

"Now, will you go upstairs promptly, Hester, and make yourself ready for your whipping?" She repeated the order in a firm strong voice, laying equal stress on every word. It was apparent to all that this was officially the second, and final, request.

Hester called on her last dwindling ounce of strength.

"Y . . . es . . . mother . . ." her voice trailed off in infinite sadness.

With her forehead pressing into the crook of her raised elbow and her frame shaking with emotion, she groped forward with an outstretched arm toward the staircase . . .

THE END

&

THE BEGINNING

